



High Peak Community Arts:

# Project eARTh evaluation

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EVALUATION REPORT 2021-22

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# Introduction

Project eARTh is a community arts for health project operating in the High Peak area. It has now been running for twelve years. Prior to March 2020, the project ran two weekly groups, meeting in New Mills and Buxton. Inevitably, the Covid-19 pandemic altered Project eARTh's ability to run its planned programme, and many changes had to be made. However, the project adapted to the new circumstances and has continued to deliver an arts-based programme for participants. Although there was less disruption than in the previous year, Covid continued to have an impact on the organisation of the project during 2021-22. During June and July 2021 half the group attended on alternate weeks in each location. On weeks when they were not attending in person, participants could continue with their artwork at home. Between September 2021 and May 2022, two sessions were held each week at both locations and participants attended either the morning or afternoon session. During this year, in each town, there were 36 participants who have stayed for longer than one session, making a total of 72 participants.

## Projects June 2021 – May 2022

This evaluation report includes projects carried out within the year June 2021 to May 2022. These are described below by the project co-ordinator, Alison Bowry.

### Nurture Nature

In June 2021, participants completed the 'Nurture Nature' project in both towns, working with artist Amanda Whewell. In order to keep group numbers low for covid safety, we continued to split each town group in two, initially starting with each smaller group meeting on alternate weeks.

With artwork from both New Mills and Buxton groups, we created framed pictures for St. Anne's Parish Centre in Buxton, delivered to the church in early August and installed in the church hall before the September term, where they look wonderful and really brighten the room.





## African Arts and Crafts

This project was followed in July, with both town groups doing projects on African Art, inspired by Kente cloth from Ghana; the work of artist El Anatsui of Nigeria; Abbia stones from Cameroon; Tinga Tinga art from Tanzania and Kenya; and Kanga Wisdom from Tanzania and Kenya.

The project was devised by Amanda Whewell, based on the participants' enjoyment of the World Artists' project last year. As Amanda was abroad in July, the workshops were led by artist Deb Rogers. The participants created artwork for them to keep and take home.



We found the fortnightly workshops unsatisfactory, as people found it difficult to remember when to attend, and if they missed a week, it meant a long gap before they returned. It also proved difficult for most participants to do the artworks set (in hand-outs and online) for the week at home in between workshops, so progressive learning and building of the artwork suffered.

By September 2021, we had raised funds from Public Health to instead split hold two groups per week in each town, split into morning and afternoon sessions. This gave us the smaller groups, and room for new referrals. In September, each group had a workshop making 3D items from alpaca fleece, before starting other projects.

## Fused Glass Clocks

In Buxton, the groups finished a fused glass clock project, which had been put on hold during lockdown, working with artist Deb Rogers to make two clocks, as well as small pieces to take home.



## Project eARTh Song

In New Mills, the groups recorded a song about Project eARTh with musician Claire Mooney – again completing a project started before the pandemic.

## Celebration

Then in November 2021, we held two events, morning and afternoon, with participants from both towns to celebrate the 'Nurture Nature', the fused glass clocks; the Project eARTh song; and the completed Mexican Embroidery wall hanging, created from all the amazing embroidery from the third lockdown, completed over the summer and early autumn 2021. The morning event was attended by the Mayor of the High Peak, and the afternoon by the Deputy Mayor.



We made a film to go with the Project eARTh song, which can be found on the High Peak Community Arts' YouTube channel. It is all about the benefits of the project.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCGFiNHqS6E>

The embroidered wall hanging is stunning and has been given to The Bureau (Volunteer Centre) in Glossop for their downstairs meeting room, where it is also visible to passers-by through their large 'shop' window.



## ***Project eARTh Song: The Lyrics***

### Intro

Grey skies as we arrive

Time to wake up and come alive.....

### VERSE 1

At Project eARTh we laugh and play

Building things from modelling clay

Creating together, working as friends

Everything's possible in the end

Exploring art of different kinds

To help and heal our ailing minds

Reviving spirits as we create

Laughing and joking, we feel great

### Chorus:

We weren't friends before

We walked through the door

Now we're not strangers any more

Our art you can see

Across the High Peak

Sharing a feeling you can't beat

### VERSE 2

Weaving for Spring Bank Arts

Powerful words close to our hearts

Embossing copper, recycling cans

Metalwork sculpture with our hands

All these things we have made

Having a jolly escapade

We brighten up where we live

With the art we freely give

### VERSE 3

Locked away in my house

Lonely as a poor church mouse

Once I'm here it's hard to see

What it was that bothered me

In this space we're not afraid

To try new things with friends we've made

Find our value and our worth

When we come to Project eARTh.



## Leaf Paper Leaf

The Buxton group then did a leaf-inspired papermaking and illustration project with artist Mir Jansen, making paper with leaves, then illustrating their handmade paper with silhouettes of leaves. The artworks were framed and given to the new premises of the Zink Project in Buxton, with a celebratory event at the end of January 2022, again with the Mayor of the High Peak, and also the Chair of Derbyshire County Council.





## Aprons

They followed this with a project with artist Deb Rogers for the participants to make their own aprons, to wear when we do messy arts projects in the future. Participants enjoyed designing their own aprons and have worn them since.





## Leaf Release

In autumn, the New Mills group did a fused glass project with artist Kay Stowell, making a variety of small pieces to take home, some glass bunting, and a large collective artwork for Whitfield House, an assisted living centre in Glossop. This was unveiled in April 2022, again with the Mayor of the High Peak – the delay in installation due to Covid restrictions at Whitfield House.



## Seed Exchange

Both groups have worked with artist Roisin O' Connor to make ceramic vegetables, fruit and flowers for a 'Seed Exchange' structure, the New Mills groups in December 2021 and January 2022, and Buxton group later, in March, April and May 2022, also making some Bilberry bees for Buxton Railway Station.

The New Mills group made their Seed Exchange (a place where residents can leave unused seeds and seedlings, and also take any they might like to grow) for Incredible Edible New Mills; and it has been placed in the Community Pantry in New Mills Indoor Market, a project which provides a cheap food source for struggling families. This was unveiled on March 24<sup>th</sup>, along with the High Peak Communi-Tree, attended by the Mayor of the High Peak (see below for details of that project).

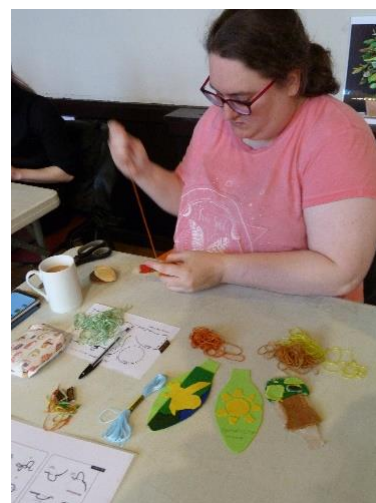


The Buxton Seed Exchange ceramics are being fired, and the structure being made, for installation in The Pavilion Gardens when completed, in a partnership with the Serpentine Community Garden; whilst the bees will go to the Railway Station Garden.



## High Peak Communi-Tree

In February and March 2022, the New Mills group did a project making a 'High Peak Communi-Tree' for Spring Bank Arts with artist Alison Evans, which was unveiled alongside the Seed Exchange at the end of March. The Communi-Tree project involved participants embroidering leaves for a sculptured tree, on a theme of the High Peak. The tree was given to Spring Bank Arts Centre.





## Longdendale Ceramic Tiles

In March/ April / May 2022, the New Mills groups worked with artist Helen Newman to create ceramic tiles for the outdoors at Longdendale Environmental Education Centre. Both morning and afternoon groups made a joint trip to visit the centre and its grounds, with a talk and then a walk led by the Peak Park Rangers. Those unable or not keen to walk in the woods, had creative activities in the Education Centre. Everyone enjoyed the trip and were inspired to design their tiles. These are being fired and will be installed over the late Summer, with a Celebratory Event in September.

Here are photos before firing



## Evaluation methodology

Just as the project itself had to be adapted in response to Covid restrictions, so too did the evaluation. Data were collected using the following methods.

### **a. Participant surveys**

Short baseline and follow up surveys are completed by Project eARTh participants when they join the project (or in summer 2020 for long-term participants), then at approximately six-monthly intervals. The survey is divided into three sections: making connections; confidence and resilience; and wellbeing, each consisting of a series of Likert type scale questions, plus space for open-ended comments. Surveys are administered by the mental health support worker or other Project eARTh staff. Participants also have the option to self-complete the surveys online.

### **b. Workshop feedback forms**

At the start and end of each session, participants are asked to complete a short form asking them to rate their mood at both points, as well as providing open-ended comments on the session.

### **c. Observation of workshop sessions**

Four workshop sessions covering four different projects were observed (3 New Mills, 1 Buxton). These visits included observation of the activities and informal conversations with participants.

### **d. Observation of celebration events**

The evaluator also attended two celebration events, one at Buxton in autumn 2021 (attended by participants from both Buxton and New Mills) and one at New Mills for participants from this group in Spring 2022. Again, this involved observing the activities and talking to participants and visitors.

### **e. Case study interviews with case study participants**

To explore the impact of Project eARTh on individuals in greater depth, three longer case study interviews were conducted with two participants from New Mills and one participant from Buxton who has started volunteering at New Mills.

### **f. Interviews with artists**

Following each commission, interviews were conducted with artists involved to gather their feedback on the sessions. These interviews were conducted online. Eight artists were interviewed by phone or online.

### **g. Interviews with volunteers**

Five Project eARTh volunteers were interviewed to explore their views on the project. These interviews were conducted online or by phone.

### **h. Feedback from organisations where artwork is displayed**

Organizations receiving artworks created through Project eARTh were contacted by email and asked to provide feedback about the artwork. They were also asked about any impact or responses it had provoked. Six organisations provided feedback.

# Impacts on connections, confidence and wellbeing

As described above, all participants are asked to complete a baseline survey when they start attending the project (or at the start of this evaluation cycle in summer/autumn 2020 for long-term participants). Participants then complete a follow up survey at approximately six-month intervals. The following section compares survey responses throughout the 2021-22 project year in relation to participants' baseline, plus responses from those who completed surveys at the start and end of the year (in autumn 2021 and summer 2022). Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on society in general during this year, so participants' responses at various points during the year is likely to be affected by changes in restrictions and so forth.

## Quantitative data

### Summer/autumn 2021 compared to baseline

In total, 29 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up survey in summer/early autumn 2021. Of these, 17 were from New Mills and 12 from the Buxton group. The results of the baseline and follow up surveys were compared using matched pairs t-tests.

For each of the following statements, there was evidence of an improvement between the baseline and follow up surveys:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones\*
- I've been taking part in other activities
- I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good
- I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing
- I've been feeling anxious or depressed.

In the case of 'I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones' the change between the baseline and follow up surveys was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). For the other statements listed above, there was a small improvement in the average difference, but this was not statistically significant.

Table 1 shows the number of participants with scores higher, lower and the same as the baseline, and the average difference (when the Likert scale used is converted to numerical scores).



Statement	Follow up rating lower than baseline	Follow up rating higher than baseline	Follow up rating same as baseline	Mean difference
I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones	3	14	12	0.62*
I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people	10	6	13	-0.21
I've been taking part in other activities	10	11	8	0.07
I feel part of the local community	9	9	11	-0.14
I've been feeling confident	10	6	13	-0.24
I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good	9	10	10	0.03
I feel like I've been coping well with problems	6	6	17	-0.07
I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals**	12	11	6	-0.03
I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing	6	9	14	0.24
I have been feeling anxious or depressed**	6	10	13	0.21
I have been feeling motivated	8	6	15	-0.17
I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful	11	10	8	-0.17
I have been feeling relaxed	9	7	13	-0.07

Table 1: Baseline and follow up summer/autumn 2021 ratings comparison (\* statistically significant; \*\*reversed scale)

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing' (indicated by colour-coding on Table 1):

- 52% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 48% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 38% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

However, at this point, Covid restrictions – both within the groups and outside - were clearly still affecting members of the group and limiting interactions for many:

*It has been difficult getting to know people as we have not been working together or in small groups due to social distancing. I still try to say 'hello' to people, especially anyone new to the group but it is difficult to hold conversations whilst staying safe re Covid.*

*I have attended the art group once a fortnight but I do not feel like I have been able to talk to participants because of the social distancing measures put in place i.e. being sat on individual desks 2 metres apart*

*I have felt too anxious to attend the art group, but I have kept in contact with another participant...I am still very wary of Covid and feel I need to protect my family from infection. My motivation has reduced due to not having access to the groups and activities I did pre-Covid.*

*Lockdown has changed every aspect of my life and my self-esteem.*

A number of participants described how the pandemic had affected their mental health, and often restricted access to support services:

*I was very low in mood and my self-esteem was on the floor. I had to rely on friends and family to sort out any problems. I needed support services but they were unavailable during Covid and for a long time after.*

*At home, I was socially isolated, anxious and low in mood. I feared I would go into a deep depression. I ruminated about negative things and I felt little motivation to do anything other than sit in a chair with a blanket to keep warm. Doing the remote art projects helped a bit but was no substitute for the human contact you get from going to the group.*

*I have received lots of support from my family. I have needed more support from health services but due to the pandemic this has not always been available.*

*I have felt very frustrated with services over the past couple of years, workers/carers who let me down by not turning up when they are supposed to, or only staying 5 minutes. I appreciate the efforts of HPCA's and Project eARTh for keeping in-touch and for keep-on going.*

*My family deal with any problems as I tend to bury my head in the sand. I have needed support from services but I have not been able to access due to Covid.*

*I have felt low in mood at times and I get worried by watching the news. I want to keep informed but the news is full of depressing stories. I was hoping with all the vaccinations that life would return to normal, but there is so much uncertainty. This has shook my confidence and brings my mood down.*

*I was feeling quite unhappy and fed-up due to social isolation from shielding re: Covid. I missed my activities and going out. I am feeling much better for starting my voluntary work which gets me out of my supported accommodation for 3 days a week. I am also hoping to start back at the art groups in Sept should Covid allow.*

### **Winter/spring 2021 compared to baseline**

In total, 12 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up in late winter/early spring 2022. Of these, 5 were from New Mills and 7 from the Buxton group. Again, the results of the baseline and follow up surveys were compared using matched pairs t-tests.

For each of the following statements, there was evidence of an improvement between the baseline and follow up surveys:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones\*
- I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people
- I've been taking part in other activities
- I feel part of the local community
- I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good
- I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals
- I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing\*
- I have been feeling anxious or depressed
- I've been feeling motivated
- I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful.

In the case of 'I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones' ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 'I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing' ( $p < 0.01$ ), the change between the baseline and follow up surveys was statistically significant. For the other statements listed above, there was a small improvement in the average difference, but this was not statistically significant.

Table 2 shows the number of participants with scores higher, lower and the same as the baseline, and the average difference (when the Likert scale used is converted to numerical scores).



Statement	Follow up rating lower than baseline	Follow up rating higher than baseline	Follow up rating same as baseline	Mean difference
I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones	1	7	4	0.92*
I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people	3	6	3	0.42
I've been taking part in other activities	3	5	4	0.5
I feel part of the local community	4	4	4	0.08
I've been feeling confident	5	4	3	-0.25
I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good	4	5	3	0.08
I feel like I've been coping well with problems	4	4	4	0
I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals**	4	5	3	0.42
I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing	0	6	6	0.58*
I have been feeling anxious or depressed**	3	7	2	0.25
I have been feeling motivated	3	6	3	0.17
I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful	3	6	3	0.25
I have been feeling relaxed	3	4	5	-0.08

Table 2: Baseline and follow up spring 2022 ratings comparison (\* statistically significant; \*\*reversed scale)

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing' (indicated by colour-coding on Table 2):

- 50% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 42% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 67% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

Although some Project eARTh participants were taking part in more social activities as pandemic restrictions eased, Covid was still having an impact and limiting the extent to which some socialised and took part in other activities:

*I have returned to the Community Garden in Buxton where I volunteer on a Wednesday.*

*I feel much better for not having to shield anymore and can go out see people and do activities.*

*I have recently returned to the face-to-face sessions at the art group after shielding for most of the pandemic. I am enjoying talking to participants...*

*I am still doing much less than pre-pandemic in terms of going out and seeing people. I have just returned to the gym and of course, do the Monday art group.*

*I have started to go back to The Grapevine in Buxton where I use the social drop in. Not gone back to swimming as too cold...I would like to get to know more people and I look forward to being able to socialise more at the art group when we no longer need to social distance or wear masks.*

*I am usually a happy and out-going person, but the ongoing situation with Covid and the bad weather has made me feel down more often. I also had a spell in hospital...and I found this very socially isolating as people could not visit me...I always look forward to going to the art group and being around people.*

## **Summer 2022 compared to baseline**

In total, 14 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up in summer 2022. Of these, 10 were from New Mills and 4 from the Buxton group. The results of the baseline and follow up surveys were compared using matched pairs t-tests.

At this point, there was evidence of an improvement between *all* statements in the baseline and follow up surveys:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones\*
- I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people
- I've been taking part in other activities\*
- I feel part of the local community
- I've been feeling confident\*
- I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good\*
- I feel like I've been coping well with problems
- I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals
- I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing
- I have been feeling anxious or depressed
- I've been feeling motivated\*

- I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful\*
- I have been feeling relaxed.

In the case of 'I've been taking part in other activities' ( $p<0.01$ ); 'I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones' ( $p<0.05$ ); 'I've been feeling confident' ( $p<0.05$ ); 'I've been feeling good about myself and my self-esteem is good' ( $p<0.05$ ); 'I have been feeling motivated' ( $p<0.05$ ) and 'I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful' ( $p<0.05$ ) the change between the baseline and follow up surveys was statistically significant. For the other statements listed above, there was a small improvement in the average difference, but this was not statistically significant.

Table 3 shows the number of participants with scores higher, lower and the same as the baseline, and the average difference (when the Likert scale used is converted to numerical scores).

Statement	Follow up rating lower than baseline	Follow up rating higher than baseline	Follow up rating same as baseline	Mean difference
I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones	3	7	4	0.71*
I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people	6	6	2	0.14
I've been taking part in other activities	1	10	3	1.07*
I feel part of the local community	3	8	3	0.43
I've been feeling confident	2	8	4	0.57*
I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good	2	7	5	0.43*
I feel like I've been coping well with problems	1	4	9	0.43
I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals**	4	6	4	0.21
I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing	3	5	6	0.21
I have been feeling anxious or depressed**	1	5	8	0.5
I have been feeling motivated	1	6	7	0.64*
I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful	3	8	3	0.71*
I have been feeling relaxed	3	7	4	0.5

Table 3: Baseline and follow up summer 2022 ratings comparison (\* statistically significant; \*\*reversed scale)

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing' (indicated by colour-coding on Table 3):



- 71% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 86% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 79% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

By this point, Covid was mentioned much less frequently and participants were more likely to mention other social activities they were doing alongside Project eARTh.

*I am going to the Zink project where I see other participants who attend the art group. We play board games and I am learning to play the guitar with a tutor there. I have started volunteering at the Food Bank on a Friday.*

*Since Covid I have returned to the art group and this has helped me significantly.*

*I go to 'Ambitions' in Ashton and engage in their social groups and go on trips.*

*Pretty much the same but slowly trying to get back to normal life since the pandemic.*

*Since Covid, I have returned to the art group and this has helped me significantly.*

## Summer 2022 compared to autumn 2021

As well as comparing follow up survey responses to baseline surveys, it is worth comparing responses in autumn 2021 (when Project eARTh returned to weekly sessions) and summer 2022. In total, 12 participants completed a survey in both autumn 2021 and in summer 2022. Of these, 8 were from New Mills and 4 from the Buxton group. The results of the surveys were compared using matched pairs t-tests.

For each of the following statements, there was evidence of an improvement between the autumn 2021 and summer 2022 surveys:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones\*
- I've been taking part in other activities
- I feel part of the local community
- I've been feeling confident\*
- I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good
- I feel like I've been coping well with problems\*
- I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals\*

- I have been feeling anxious or depressed
- I've been feeling motivated
- I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful
- I have been feeling relaxed.

In the case of 'I've been feeling confident' ( $p<0.01$ ); I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones ( $p<0.05$ ); I feel like I've been coping well with problems ( $p<0.05$ ); and I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals ( $p<0.05$ ), the difference between the autumn 2021 and summer 2022 surveys was statistically significant. For the other statements listed above, there was a small improvement in the average difference, but this was not statistically significant.

Table 4 shows the number of participants with summer 2022 scores higher, lower and the same as autumn 2021, and the average difference (when the Likert scale used is converted to numerical scores).

Statement	Summer 22 rating lower than autumn 21	Summer 22 rating higher than autumn 21	Summer 22 rating same as autumn 21	Mean difference
I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones	1	5	6	0.67*
I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people	8	3	1	-0.33
I've been taking part in other activities	3	7	2	0.58
I feel part of the local community	1	5	6	0.5
I've been feeling confident	2	10	0	1.08*
I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good	2	5	5	0.33
I feel like I've been coping well with problems	0	5	7	0.58*
I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals**	1	5	6	0.67*
I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing	4	4	4	0
I have been feeling anxious or depressed**	2	4	6	0.33
I have been feeling motivated	1	4	7	0.33
I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful	3	3	6	0.42
I have been feeling relaxed	3	4	5	0.33

Table 4: Autumn 2021 and summer 2022 ratings comparison (\* statistically significant; \*\*reversed scale)

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for ‘making connections’; ‘confidence and resilience’; and ‘wellbeing’ (indicated by colour-coding on Table 4):

- 67% of participants had a higher ‘making connections’ score in the summer 2022 survey than they had done in autumn 2021.
- 75% of participants had a higher ‘confidence and resilience’ score in the summer 2022 survey than they had done in autumn 2021.
- 50% of participants had a higher ‘wellbeing’ score in the summer 2022 survey than they had done in autumn 2021.

## Qualitative data

Comments provided on the baseline and follow up surveys, as well as observations of sessions (workshops and celebration events) and short interviews with participants demonstrate the ways in which Project eARTh supports connections; confidence and resilience; and wellbeing.

### Making connections

Project eARTh clearly has an impact on many participants’ ability to make connections, feel less isolated and feel part of a community. Comments reflecting on this included:

*I come for company as much as art.*

*It gets me out of the house.*

*It’s a lifeline. I spend a lot of time on my own...a lot.*

*It’s not just about art; it’s about people, being social.*

*I am coming to the group for social contact as I now live on my own.*

*My motivation has also been poor, but my family encourage me to go to the group. I enjoy being around other people and having a reason to go out.*

*I feel part of the ‘project eARTh’ community, less so my local one.*

Participants valued the friendships they had developed through Project eARTh and, for some, these had extended outside the weekly sessions:

*I have made friends in the group and I see them outside of the art sessions.*



*I value the friendships I have made at the group and it gives me a reason to go out on a Thursday.*

*I have made friends at this group which has made me happy.*

*You meet new people and have a good chat. Sometimes these people become your friends and you interact with them outside of the group.*

Many participants commented on social aspects of the sessions. For example, sharing a birthday cake and chatting with friends.

*It was lovely to feel safe in the group and see my friends and chat.*

*Enjoyed coming out and mixing with other people.*

*Everyone was very nice, helpful and chatty. Brilliant group!*

*People were nice, friendly and encouraging.*

*So satisfying to work together.*

For some participants, Project eARTh can be the only social activity they take part in. This was especially true during the earlier part of the year when Covid restrictions were still in place:

*I have mostly been at home caring for my husband who has been very ill, but is recovering. I do not do any other activities and I have not seen anyone outside of the group.*

*I do not see other people or do any other group/activity.*

*The art group is the only activity I do outside the home.*

*I am becoming more house bound due to my ill health. The group is my social relief. I love coming!*

*I am not doing any other activities or groups at the moment and I don't see many people outside of the group home where I live.*

*I do not mix with people. I have social anxiety and I do not like crowds. I am socially isolated...I have recently started going to the art group and I have started talking to some people. I do not do any other activities.*

*I am socially isolated and I have no family or friends. The only people I see are at the art group.*

During 2021-22, as Covid restrictions have gradually eased, arrangements in the Project eARTh workshops have adapted, as described in the Introduction. By spring 2022, although each location was still divided into two groups, participants were able to sit together on tables of about four. Although they had been able to support each other and share ideas whilst on individual tables, this was obviously much easier once participants were sitting together once more. In the observed sessions, several participants commented on how this made the sessions feel more social and more 'normal':

*It feels more normal now. I mean, it was lovely coming back when we're all on individual tables. So we were halfway there...and we were doing the crafts and we got the artists and everything. But it made you realise just how much being in a group actually makes the big difference. So now, we're in a 3 or 4 It's even better, because you can share stuff and chat a bit and you know, so it's really nice. And now we can move around...we're walking around to go and see friends and that makes a really big difference.*

### **Confidence and resilience**

There was also evidence of how participating in Project eARTh helps to support participants' confidence, coping skills and self-esteem.

*Being part of project eARTh has helped me to start being creative again. This has in turn improved my daily mental health and allowed me to do 'something for myself'.*

*Going to the art group gives me a sense of purpose, gets me out of the house and around people.*

*Art and craft can be relaxing. Gives me a sense of achievement.*

*I am trying to etch out sometime for myself to relax and get absorbed in the artwork. My home circumstances are difficult and the group is helping me to manage my difficulties.*

*It is my confidence I need to improve as I would like to be more sociable and have a friend I could go for a coffee with. I am going to an art group celebration event on Monday and that will give me the opportunity to practise my social skills.*

*Attending the group helps me in so many ways. It helps me through difficult times.*

There is a clear sense of pride in the artwork produced; this was particularly evident in the way that participants shared their artwork and talked about their contribution to the finished pieces with the Mayor/Deputy Mayor, visitors and participants from the other group at the celebration events. Participants were pleased that their art was placed in community locations where it could be seen by the local community:

*Proud of my tile to show the public*

*My tile looked better than I thought it would*

*My bee looked stunning*

*I thought that I did an excellent job at my apron*

*They are going to look fabulous when the whole project finishes.*

A few participants also said that learning about the various organisations Project eARTh artwork was designed for had made them more aware of services and resources available locally they were not previously familiar with.

Some participants said that attending Project eARTh had given them confidence to try activities they may not have believed they would be capable of. In other cases, doing new activities as part of Project eARTh inspired participants to try more creative activities at home:

*Surprising myself, really enjoyed the sewing*

*I carried on with my embroidery at home*

*I did find it difficult, but it was worth it.*

## **Wellbeing**

Many participants commented that Project eARTh supported their wellbeing and felt it would have a negative impact if they were not able to attend. Comments included:

*Helps me take my mind off a lot of anxiety.*

*I feel positive about coming to the art group, people are very friendly and I enjoy learning new skills. This group will be part of my recovery!*

*The group takes my mind off my negative thoughts. I am not motivated to do the art projects at home on my own.*

*I feel better for coming. It gets me out of the flat and I like seeing familiar faces in the group.*

*I have really needed the face-to-face contact at the art groups. If I had not been attending the group, my mood would have been much worse.*

*People to talk to as suffering a bereavement and would have been sat at home on my own.*

*I have an adult son with mental health problems who creates a lot of anxiety for me. The art group is 'my time' to relax, have a go at doing something creative and meet new people to chat with.*

*This group helps my mental health out massively*

*The art groups help me to forget my problems.*

*I am so thankful for the art groups as they are what keeps me going!*

*I enjoy going to the group. The artwork takes my mind off my worries and I like getting to know other people in the group.*

*I usually enjoy doing the art and by attending the group I know it improves my mental wellbeing.*

*I really value going to the group and feel I have made friends, alas due to my poor health I have not been able to attend as often as I would like and this has impacted negatively on my mental health.*

*I urge people with problems to join a group like HPCA's as it is a life changer! It gets me out of my bed, out of my house, and gets me motivated.*



## Feedback on workshop sessions

Whilst the baseline and follow up surveys gather data from participants over the longer term, workshop feedback forms help to demonstrate the immediate impact of attending Project eARTh sessions.

The workshop feedback form asks participants to sum up in a single word how they feel at the start of a workshop, and how they feel at the end. Figure 1 represents their 'before' responses, across all of the 2021-22 sessions, as a Wordle. The most frequently mentioned words were 'tired', 'anxious' and 'good'. Overall, 45% of participants used negative words to describe their feelings at the start of the session; 23% used neutral words (e.g. ok); and 32% used positive words (perhaps in anticipation of the session in some cases).



Fig 1: Wordle of 'before' words

Figure 2 represents participants' 'after' responses as a Wordle. The most frequently mentioned words were 'happy', 'relaxed', 'good' and 'great'. Overall, 94% of participants used positive words to describe their feelings; 4% used neutral or indeterminate words; and only 2% used negative words.



Date	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after <sup>2</sup>	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
<b>Half group attending alternate weeks</b>				
10 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	10	100%	3.5	Yes (p<0.01)
17 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	3	100%	3.0	No
24 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	6	100%	4.2	Yes (p<0.01)
1 <sup>st</sup> July 2021	4	75%	3.3	Yes (p<0.05)
8 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	5	100%	4.0	Yes (p<0.01)
15 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	4	100%	2.3	No
22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2021	6	100%	4.2	Yes (p<0.01)
29 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	2	100%	3.0	No
<b>Morning and afternoon sessions each week</b>				
16 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2021	14	100%	3.1	Yes (p<0.01)
23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept 2021	6	100%	3.3	Yes (p<0.05)
30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2021	18	82%	2.6	Yes (p<0.01)
7 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2021	14	92%	3.0	Yes (p<0.01)
14 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2021	15	100%	3.2	Yes (p<0.01)
21 <sup>st</sup> Oct 2021	14	100%	3.4	Yes (p<0.01)
11 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2021	18	94%	3.2	Yes (p<0.01)
18 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2021	11	100%	3.5	Yes (p<0.01)
25 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2021	13	100%	3.4	Yes (p<0.01)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Dec 2021	15	100%	3.1	Yes (p<0.01)
9 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2021	12	100%	3.7	Yes (p<0.01)
16 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2021	14	93%	3.1	Yes (p<0.01)
13 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2022	10	100%	4.0	Yes (p<0.01)
20 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2022	11	100%	3.5	Yes (p<0.01)
27 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2022	17	100%	3.6	Yes (p<0.01)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Feb 2022	13	92%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
10 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2022	15	93%	2.8	Yes (p<0.01)
17 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2022	11	100%	3.3	Yes (p<0.01)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Mar 2022	12	100%	3.8	Yes (p<0.01)
10 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2022	14	100%	3.1	Yes (p<0.01)
17 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2022	16	94%	2.6	Yes (p<0.01)
31 <sup>st</sup> Mar 2022	15	100%	3.5	Yes (p<0.01)
7 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2022	15	100%	3.4	Yes (p<0.01)
28 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2022	14	86%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
5 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	15	100%	2.6	Yes (p<0.01)

<sup>2</sup> Participants giving a 'before' rating of 10 are excluded as they are unable to give a higher 'after' score.

12 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	15	93%	3.5	Yes (p<0.01)
19 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	15	100%	3.2	Yes (p<0.01)
26 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	10	90%	3.8	Yes (p<0.01)
<b>All sessions</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>Yes (p&lt;0.01)</b>

Table 5: New Mills session feedback

### Buxton

Overall, Buxton participants reported feeling better after the activity on 95% of occasions. The average difference in their ratings (out of 10) before and after a session was 2.1 (a statistically significant difference; p<0.01). The average difference ranged from 0 to 3.0.

With one exception, in sessions where at least 5 participants completed a feedback form, there was evidence of a statistically significance between 'before' and 'after' scores (participants felt better after). In 68% of sessions held during the year, *all* the participants who completed a feedback form said they felt better afterwards.

Date	No. of participants completing feedback forms	% of participants feeling better after	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
<b>Half group attending alternate weeks</b>				
21 <sup>st</sup> June 2021	3	100%	2.0	No
28 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	5	100%	1.0	Yes (p<0.05)
19 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	3	100%	2.7	No
26 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	6	100%	1.7	Yes (p<0.05)
<b>Morning and afternoon sessions each week</b>				
26 <sup>th</sup> Aug 2021	13	100%	2.5	Yes (p<0.01)
13 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2021	9	100%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
27 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2021	11	100%	2.0	Yes (p<0.01)
4 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2021	13	100%	1.9	Yes (p<0.01)
11 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2021	10	71%	0	No
1 <sup>st</sup> Nov 2021	7	100%	1.6	Yes (p<0.01)
22 <sup>nd</sup> Nov 2021	9	86%	2.0	Yes (p<0.05)
6 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2021	5	100%	1.6	Yes (p<0.05)
13 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2021	11	100%	2.8	Yes (p<0.01)
10 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2022	8	100%	2.0	Yes (p<0.01)
17 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2022	14	91%	1.9	Yes (p<0.01)
24 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2022	12	90%	2.6	Yes (p<0.01)
31 <sup>st</sup> Jan 2022	14	92%	1.7	Yes (p<0.01)
7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2022	9	100%	1.9	Yes (p<0.01)
14 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2022	8	100%	2.3	Yes (p<0.05)



7 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2022	15	86%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
14 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2022	12	91%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
21 <sup>st</sup> Mar 2022	15	100%	2.5	Yes (p<0.01)
28 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2022	12	89%	1.5	Yes (p<0.05)
4 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2022	5	100%	2.2	Yes (p<0.05)
25 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2022	8	100%	3.0	Yes (p<0.01)
9 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	10	100%	1.7	Yes (p<0.01)
16 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	11	100%	2.5	Yes (p<0.01)
23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2022	18	94%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
<b>All sessions</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>Yes (p&lt;0.01)</b>

Table 6: Buxton session feedback

The workshop feedback forms also ask participants from both groups to comment on what they liked, disliked and learnt during each session.

Aspects that participants **liked** included experimenting with the various arts techniques. For example:

*Making textured / wax resist papers for future work*

*Designing with fused glass*

*Stencilling, painting and cutting out for making the leaf picture*

*Painting, glazing the clay leaf and flowers*

*Learning how to do a paper resist letter*

*Learning more glazing techniques*

*Concentrating on the sewing*

*Painting and decorating ceramic tiles.*

For some, the arts activities had a therapeutic value:

*This class takes my mind off things*

*How my pictures turned out and its very therapeutic*

*It was soothing and relaxing to do and simple.*

*The calm and peacefulness that comes with painting the clay*

*How relaxing it was to concentrate on modelling*

*Embroidering is very relaxing and enjoyable.*

Others commented on the social elements of the session:

*Sitting together, chatting and comparing work*

*The people, friendly and helpful*

*Having a laugh with the other participants*

*I enjoyed being with my friends in the group*

*Meeting up again with my usual table and it was fun.*

As well as socialising with other participants, some mentioned the interactions with artists as an aspect of the session they had enjoyed:

*Meeting [artist] and hearing about her life.*

*Seeing the lovely [artist] again!*

*Meeting [artist]. She was enthusiastic and happy and supportive.*

Another common theme was the overall environment and atmosphere of the group. Participants used words such as calm, relaxing and uplifting to describe their experiences of the sessions:

*The welcoming atmosphere and staff*

*Lovely morning, uplifting, I could cope with anything now*

*The calm, creative atmosphere*

Some participants also liked having the chance to do something new:

*The opportunity to try something I have never done before*

*Learning about something new and different.*

When asked what they had **disliked**, the most frequent response was the length of sessions (which were reduced from 2.5 hours to 2 hours from September onwards to accommodate two groups per day). Many commented how fast the time went:

*I know we've got a shorter meeting time, but I felt quite rushed and it was unsettling*

*The shortness of time - really miss that extra 30 mins*

*Wanted more time to make more*

*Too short a time, would have been nice to have a little longer to finish.*

Some participants mentioned some of the art techniques that they had found challenging or felt frustrated because they could do as well as they would have liked to:

*I was disappointed with my rainbow plaque I'd made. The orange and the yellow came out red.*

*Not knowing how the colour will turn out*

*How I made tiny mistakes when painting my outline*

*I found it very difficult to manipulate the glass because my hands shake a great amount*

*Realising I got some of the process wrong put pins wrong and it falling apart in the process*

*Had to be careful not to get glass in my skin.*

Others mentioned factors related to their own health or mood, or to events outside the session itself, such as the weather or their journey to the venue:

*My own tiredness and I am working on it*

*Not being myself at the moment*

*Being late and having a painful back again*

*The journey here.*

When asked about what they had **learnt**, participants said they gained a wide range of artistic skills and knowledge through the sessions. For example:

*A lot about textures and about being experimental with colour*

*Different sorts of mark making, to be more free when drawing*

*Cutting a paper pattern and transferring it to fabric*

*How to use a sewing machine for the first time*

*How to do paper resist on clay with newspaper and coloured slip*

*How to stitch and new stitches I'd not done before*

*How to create paper using natural materials*

*To use different tools for sculpting*

*Using a microphone and sing professionally*

*About different types of glass and the ability to use them artistically*

*How to use different felting tools*

*How to use cut out tracing paper to make a collage.*

Other comments reflected on learning about the local environment and the natural world more generally:

*About the Peak District's landscape and wildlife*

*That there are cuckoo bees that lay their eggs in bumble bee nests!*

*About industry, fossils and different areas*



*Lots of bird sounds. Matching birds to chicks and eggs.*

Another aspect of learning often seen in the responses involved participants learning about themselves and gaining confidence through involvement in the sessions:

*That I can participate even when not my best and progress*

*That I'm not too bad at art after all*

*That I can make things from clay*

*To accept that what I have been doing is OK. It means a lot*

*Staying calm relaxed not fussing, being sensible*

*That the more you try the better your finished piece of work is*

*How to believe in myself.*

### Future projects

Amongst participants who suggestions for ideas for the future, glass, painting, sewing and clay were the most popular responses. However, participants suggested a range of ideas as illustrated in Figure 3.



Fig 3: Wordle of ideas for the future

## Project organisation

In discussions during the observed sessions, participants commented on the efforts taken to ensure they felt safe attending Project eARTh whilst Covid remained a threat. Although many said they missed working together as they had previously, they appreciated that the measures taken helped everyone to feel comfortable attending.

Whilst most participants preferred attending each week, rather than alternate weeks, many still missed seeing people from the half of the group who attended at the other time of day. In addition, some felt that the split into morning and afternoon sessions meant the sessions felt noticeably shorter:

*It feels like it's just getting started when it ends!*

*It'll be nice if we could get back to two and a half hours feels a bit rushed to get everything done in two hours.*

During 2021-22, participants have enjoyed working with both familiar tutors and those new to Project eARTh. Several commented that they felt that the new tutors they had not worked with before suited the groups well. In the sessions, artists clearly made an effort to cater for participants with different interests and skill levels. In the song writing activity, for example, those who did not feel confident singing explained that that had been given other tasks they were more comfortable with, such as playing an instrument or helping with sound recording.

As it was not possible to hold celebration events during 2020-21, there were a number of projects to celebrate this year. Several participants commented that they had enjoyed a joint celebration event in Autumn 2021 that brought together the New Mills and Buxton groups and celebrated a number of the projects completed the previous year. There was interest and admiration for what the other town group had done:

*It was nice to get the two groups together and see what everyone has done – I really enjoyed it!*

## Case studies

Case studies were an opportunity to follow up on the brief discussions held with participants during session observations. The following case studies explore the impact of attending Project eARTh on three participants in greater depth. 'Jenny' has been attending the New Mills group for a number of

years. 'Helen' also attends the New Mills group but has joined more recently. 'Lorna' attended the Buxton group as a participant before starting to volunteer to support the New Mills sessions.

## Jenny

I've been coming to Project eARTh for about 10 years. My support worker introduced me to the project because, at that time, I was in and out of hospital quite regularly. I wasn't in a very good place; I was quite depressed and very anxious. I was really limited in what I could do and I needed quite a lot of support. But I really like art, and craft, so when I was introduced to this group, I felt really lucky. It is a lifeline for me and I haven't been admitted into hospital since 2014. I like coming to the group and it's a safe place to be. And depending on how I feel, I can be really productive, or I can just be with the group and not do anything. Often when I come in, I feel tired, or unsettled, or chaotic, or whatever and I nearly always end up being inspired, or feeling happy, or feeling in a different place completely.

The artists are fantastic. There's just so much to learn, and so many opportunities. The variety of art and crafts we do is great. And then throughout the week, you can think about ideas and think about the project and what you might do the next week. I love taking photographs, knitting and crochet. If I like what I'm doing here, I go home and do something similar there. So, we did some collage work; I didn't really think I'd like it, but I really, really did. And because I like taking photos, I did a collage of a beautiful field. But some of the things I've done here I can't do at home. I love doing the pottery here because I haven't got a kiln. And the glass fusion's been great because I can't do that at home either.

I like the thought processes behind the activities, like designing how you're going to do it. Before I came to the group, I wasn't very good at that; I kind of launched into it, whereas now I'm better at thinking about it and planning it.

I've made friends here. I know people and it's really supportive. But the fact that it isn't time-limited is really important to me. So many types of support are for a set period of time. I'm so much better than I was, but it still means an awful lot to me to be able to come here. If Project eARTh stopped, I definitely wouldn't feel as well as I do now. It really, really helps. Having the support worker here means that, if you've got an issue that you're struggling with, there is always somebody to talk to, so you feel like you can reach out and they can give you advice.

My confidence has really improved. Being involved with people has really helped me be able to communicate with different people. Also, the feeling of being part of something. Being able to plan; being able to get yourself into a routine and having some sort of grounding. When my head goes all over the place, it's like Thursday's the grounding point. I feel really lucky that I've been introduced to this group and it's made a massive difference to my mental health, definitely. Now I've got more confidence, I've joined another arts group, a recorder group and an orchestra where I play the flute.

When I look at the finished artwork, it feels unbelievable we've all been part of this project and we make such a beautiful thing. We've learned so many skills. I find I look at the end products and think, "Wow, all the emotions that have gone into that", and it's brilliant and somebody else can enjoy it. So it's really nice being part of a bigger thing. I really like that, in all of the places where our art's gone, people seem to be very appreciative of it. And it's great doing the launches, celebrating the art. The Mayor usually comes so that feels really special that it's going out there to more people. When I'm going around High Peak, sometimes I go to places where our art is and it feels really special to have been a part of that. I like making things for the community and it feels really nice to all work on a project and then give it to somebody and then they then they know about us; I really liked that part. It's nice to give something; it feels nice to do something and then give it to somebody - it feels like you're giving them a gift.

It's still a really valuable part of my week. My Thursday is really valuable I still benefit from it. It would be a massive impact if anything prevented me from coming anymore. I do feel like I would lose some of my confidence and some of my communication skills and I would very easily become more isolated and go into a bit of a closed down state because this pushes me to get up, get dressed, get on the bus, do something, be productive, see people.

## Lorna

I had heard about Project eARTh and I thought about it as a possible place to refer some of the people that I was working with. But then I started thinking about it for myself and my own wellbeing, thinking it could be really, really nice to get out of the house. I was working, but I was trying my best not to go in, coming up with ways of trying to work from home. So getting out the house on Monday morning was brilliant and doing something craft-wise was brilliant. Just being in a comfortable space. Everyone was very interested in me, and that was really nice. There's something about the way that people interacted with me that made me feel like "Oh, you want to know what I think", which was nice. And I love the quality of the artwork that's produced.

Sometimes, having to think about how I was feeling before the session to fill in the session feedback form was difficult. There were times when I felt absolutely terrible. But then at the end, when I'd had a really nice time, it was nice to be able to say, "I actually feel a lot better; I'm so glad I did come out".

Eventually I was thinking, "I'd really like give something back to the project; I'd really like to volunteer". But I thought, "I've got to wait," because if I'm going to make a commitment to do that, I want to make sure I'm ready. I really appreciate that I was allowed to come along as a participant because that was my step to becoming a volunteer.



I still need to get out, but actually I can help because it's in my nature and fits with the kind of work I do and other volunteering that I do. My career's always been about helping in various ways. I'm helping people in a very different way to how I used to. Even though helping here is getting a cup of tea for somebody or filling bowls of water for arts activities, I love it. It really does me good. Doing something physical like putting the tables out is actually very good. And I look forward to having a chat with people: having a chat with participants, having a chat with the artists. When I first came here to volunteer, I thought I'd probably stay for the morning, but then I'd stayed all day!

It's helped me to feel better, to feel less nervy being around people. My confidence has really increased since I started coming to Project eARTh and it has made me socialise in the way that I used to do. I've also arranged to go back to counselling. I've known that I've needed to do that, but before I was thinking, "I don't want to talk about anything with anyone".

Helping people to feel better means that they can do more. Being involved in Project eARTh means I'm in a position where I can volunteer for not just this project, but also with another project as well because I feel better.

## Helen

During the pandemic, I started interacting with Project eARTh on social media and liking things they posted. As a result, they sent me some postcards, which was lovely. I didn't go out to anything really for two years [because of Covid]. So everything nice stopped, but all the jobs still go on – you've still got to look after parents, do the domestic chores and so on. But because I'd forged this connection with Project eARTh, these packets of loveliness were appearing through the post. The connection was lovely and then they said, "Do you want to join in?" I thought, "Yes, yes!", because I am a long-term sufferer from depression and I found the pandemic very hard.

From the point of view of wellbeing, Project eARTh has really helped. Everything goes away: you come here; you mess with the clay or whatever; and you just focus in on what you're doing. You get what they call 'flow', where the whole world just goes away for a bit and your only job is to make a beautiful thing - or just make a thing it doesn't have to be beautiful! So, my mental health has been a lot better. It's still not good, but it helps and it's *almost* kickstarted me into doing stuff at home. I don't make time for art normally, but Thursday morning is the space for art for me. I'm really pleased to be part of this project.

The glass project was amazing because you don't get the chance to work with materials like that very often. The artist was brilliant with us, and it was that mixture of doing the community thing and then doing these lovely things to take away. I really enjoyed the leaf stitching project too. It took me a long time and I only did one leaf, but some of the techniques, you can then carry on with at home.

It feels interesting: learning what other people do and doing new things. I think you need to approach it with an open mind. I was involved in some of the shortlisting of projects and with some, I thought, "Oh, that's going to be absolutely rubbish". But then it turned out it was one of the things that I really liked!

For me, the process is almost more important than the outcome to deliver an artwork, but I do like the fact that it's a community making it; we're all making our own little bit and it's building into a bigger thing, and then it's going out into the community. We're so used to things being done at us, to actually be involved in things that you're doing for your community, is really important to me. So often, people parachute into an area; they do art at the community; and then they go away again and nothing happens. But this is so much better because it's actually built into the community. The community is part of it and it's part of the community. It's important to find out what people want and I think Project eARTh does that.

## Artist views

Artist feedback was gathered via online and phone interviews.

### Planning workshops

Artists' ideas for workshops were usually developed in discussion with the Project eARTh co-ordinator, taking account of the location where the final artwork would be displayed. For most artists, the natural world was an important impetus for their commission:

*So the idea with the project was, as well as doing the artwork, to encourage people to notice things when they went out. So to really look for things...even if you walk to the shop, you might see dandelions growing up in the pavement, and anything like that...maybe to encourage people to go out and actually look at what was around them.*

*I think because it was called Project eARTh, I thought maybe we should work with materials from the earth...So I just kept it really simple...making paper pulp incorporating leaf material from different species of trees...So the leaves became kind of the illustration on the paper itself.*

*...it was quite an easy brief, in a sense, where it had to be about what you would find in that area...whether it's birds or something natural, or, you know, activities you might do in the area or something like that.*

Whilst some artists had quite a detailed structure from the start of the project, others took a more open approach:

*...having seen some people work with the group and it's just like, "This is how you do something. And this is how it's done". But I think, "We've got a blank page here. I have absolutely no idea what this is. But all I do know is fantastic by the end!" ...So it's not a teaching workshop at all. It's a participatory kind of thing.*

In one case, one artist delivered a project that had been planned by another artist. The delivery artist commented on the potential value of working in 'partnership' with another artist, even though this was remote:

*It's much harder to just be that lone person. So this was still being a lone person. But...it was like a partnership working remotely. It was nice...it was a different way for me to work and I liked looking at how other people work. It was great. It was really helpful. She was so thorough, and you know, it taught me...to think about the way that she was working, which was really great.*

Some of the artists who had not worked with Project eARTh before felt they would have liked more information about participants before they started working with participants:

*I hadn't realised...the range of people... physical difficulties and also some early onset dementia...I hadn't really grasped that it was that wider range. So yeah, it...would have been useful to know a little bit more about the people that were taking part.*

*It would have been really helpful to have known a bit more about [the group] ...I thought I was going into a group like a craft group and I didn't realise exactly what the group was about.*

One of the artists said they would recommend visiting the group before planning sessions. However, an artist who worked with the group in the latter part of the year praised the support they had received with planning, including information about the groups prior to starting the sessions:

*...the support from the staff and the organisation was really good, in terms of...how to keep things on track and who was attending the groups, like knowing about the different people who would come in and things like that was really helpful, because sometimes you can get thrown into a workshop and you don't know anything about the people...so it's always good to have a bit of a heads up on different people's needs and things like that.*

## **Participant skills developed**

Artists highlighted a variety of skills that they felt participants had gained through involvement in the workshops. When discussing the artistic skills they felt participants had developed, most artists focused on the ways in which the workshops had built on, or enhanced, the existing skills of participants:

*We did a week of printmaking, and we did a week of collage...So there were lots of things that they would have done before, but it was very much also doing it with things that you'd got lying around so not having to go out and buy expensive materials. So we were printing with bits of corrugated cardboard and bits of polystyrene and things like that.*

*...a lot of them were really knowledgeable in that area...even though some of them hadn't done, maybe the techniques that were used, or decorative slips that were used and things like that; they might have done it in a different way.*

As some artists pointed out, there could be wide variation in artistic skill levels amongst Project eARTh participants:

*There's one or two people who found it quite difficult to do it...Others found it very easy. Some people took a long time over it; other people just did it very quickly. So it was like all sorts of abilities.*

However, even for participants who have been attending for number of years and have experience of various artists techniques, there were still opportunities to develop new skills that they might find challenging at first:

*...we were trying to work in layers, so we were trying to make backgrounds using some collage or printing techniques, and then we were going to put the animal or the flower or whatever, on top of that. And some people were fine with it. But some people, it just totally confused them. They weren't able to layer; they wanted to do the whole drawing first...I think perhaps because they are maybe better artistically...they want to have their whole picture drawn out...I think in the end, most people got the idea of the layering...*

For those who had less experience, Project eARTh workshops could help them to feel more confident about their skills:

*[Some participants were] really nervous about using the sewing machine... with a little bit of coaxing, they did it, and they did well. And also, I think it improved their confidence to actually work in that practical capacity. The thought that they couldn't do it or the fear that they couldn't do it was there initially, until they were kind of eased into it.*

Participants did not only learn from the professional artists, but in many cases, learnt from each other too:

*Every session we looked at everybody's piece of work after it had been fired. And it was good for sharing and seeing how things are turned out because some people had...done a bit of an*



*experiment...And we did spend probably 10-15 minutes each session, just looking at other people's work and what had occurred over in the kiln. So that was nice.*

*...they might be helping others as well in the group, which is a nice thing to see. Because then your skills that you go there with are transferred to them, and then transferred to somebody else. So I really, I really liked that process.*

Several artists also mentioned knowledge or understanding of nature which they felt participants had gained through participating in the workshops:

*I hope they did learn about nature, because I had a lot of books...One lady brought in a photograph of a bee she'd found in her garden, and she wanted to base her college on that bee. And I had an insect book...So she got the book and started looking at bees and found out that the bee that she had photographed was a cuckoo bee...So people were actually looking up things and finding out about nature.*

An artist described how attending Project eARTh could also help participants to develop organisational skills and provide them with an opportunity to structure their week:

*...there were some people that I met in the group...the only thing that they did in the week that they knew they were going to do was come to that group, and how important it is for people to have that in the week because life's already quite unstructured and angst ridden...*

Another artist felt that taking part in the workshops had helped participants to develop skills around understanding the need to work flexibly, to allow for different elements of the artistic process:

*...flexibility...just because of the way things work out and needing things to dry and how long something will take and like waiting for things to go in a kiln and stuff like that...explaining to them that it might not come back next week, so you might have to work on something different for next week and just trying to be flexible but also supportive with that flexibility.*

## **Support from volunteers**

Artists appreciated the support they received from Project eARTh volunteers:

*I thought they were really supportive. Certainly with Covid measures...they helped sanitise all the tables and all the tools and everything so that was really nice...it was good to have the support because everybody was dotted around the room. I was walking all over just trying to check on everybody. So I had a couple of people...that were going around and double checking what people were doing. And kind of just reiterating what instructions I'd given. So that was nice...they were like, assisting me, which was good.*

*I think the volunteers were all very good and took direction from me. So that was nice. Because, you know, when you rely on volunteers, you do need to say, "Oh, can you quickly do that?" And they were really responsive to that...They were great.*

*...it's probably one of the best groups that I've worked with, because everyone's just so supportive and helpful...If I needed particular support or something like I felt backed up on things and helped to do stuff. So I think maybe better than expected...I felt I might be left to do things independently, but it was really good...I felt really supported and not under loads of pressure to get things done [myself].*

## **Adaptations to plans**

Several artists who had not worked with Project eARTh previously commented on changes they would make now they knew more about the groups, and about participants' interests, needs and skill levels:

*I would have included other ways of going about it, other than sewing...I would have actually done some preparation for that as well and had the materials there from the start for them to be able to...if they really didn't like doing what we were doing just to be able to approach it a different way.*

*I had to reinvent a couple of the sessions. So I altered it after I understood the capabilities and maybe some of the issues of the people there, I had to alter the workshops.*

*...one of the things that I did change was that I wanted people to make their own leaf stencils...but because that involves a craft knife [which not everyone would be able to use] ...I created all the stencils, so then they all had to do was draw the stencil onto the white square of paper, and then fill it in.*

The importance of building flexibility and different options into plans for sessions was something several artists highlighted:

*I think some people really, really liked the papermaking; other people took more to the illustrations. So that was nice that there were different aspects to the project so that they didn't all do the same thing week after week, but that there were different things that they had to be doing.*

*...for me, it's about ownership...we try and get people just to say words at the end. So if they haven't done the singing, they get their voice on...*

Some artists also mentioned small changes they would make if they were undertaking a similar commission in the future, for example, shortening their introductory talk.

## Impact of Covid-19

The organisation of Project eARTh workshops changed throughout the year as Covid-19 restrictions gradually eased. For artists running workshops at the start of the year (summer 2021), there was a more noticeable impact:

*...it was the first one that we were doing after lockdown and everybody had to sit in their individual space with their individual kit, and they couldn't have a cup of tea and a biscuit, it was all a bit strange.*

As the year progressed, it was possible to start (or re-start) several projects that had been on hold during the period of more rigid Covid restrictions:

*[The project co-ordinator] contacted me and said, "Could we do it remotely?"...I decided it would end up being a gluing and sticking exercise and would be over and done with for people within a short time and it wouldn't particularly give much value....We agreed...that we're better off holding off until it was safe enough to run it in person.*

However, the way in which the groups worked and interacted continued to be impacted during late 2021 and early 2022.

*I think there was less collaborative work...if you were sat on a table, and you could look what other people were doing, and you could share your experience; it would be much more of a rewarding experience - this is my opinion. Whereas...if they're all sat individually, some of them did talk to each other, but there was some that didn't. So I think certainly those people who were slightly more withdrawn may have benefitted from being in a in a group and just sharing, even if it's only a bit with the people on their table.*

*There were challenges because, with singing...you have to space people out and there are certain challenges about that in a pandemic. So there was certain things that you have to consider that you might have considered in the past...*

However, several artists commented that they felt the smaller group size (morning/afternoon split) introduced due to Covid was a positive outcome:

*I think if there was both of the groups together, it would be quite overwhelming...I feel like it would be quite a lot to get round, make sure everyone was supported and knew what they were doing. And I felt like that was better to have two separate groups.*

*...the group was halved...for me that was much better, because it was much more manageable. As an artist, I felt that I could give everybody the attention that they needed. Whereas when it was a big group, that was really quite hard.*

## **Artworks created**

All the artists interviewed said they were impressed with the quality of the artwork produced:

*It's just absolutely amazing...the things that people come up with just surprises me and even some of the people that might not be considered good at art...It always looks amazing...I'm just always really amazed at the quality of the work, some people need a bit more encouragement. And some people like a bit of help with things, but on the whole, it's brilliant...the stitching was just beautiful. They were just absolutely gorgeous.*

*I thought it was beautiful...even with the different sorts of levels of experience, it all came together. And I thought it looked lovely...I thought it was beautiful.*

*...their ability to make beautiful pieces of work is far beyond even mine You know, I just can't make work that beautiful. They're really focused and really got some beautiful drawing skills...it's another type of creativity...that has been really honed it's really beautiful.*

*I'm really super-impressed with everything; everything just looks brilliant. You can see all the hard work and the thought process and everything behind all the designs...They've really taken time and pride in what they've made, which is really nice.*

Several artists commented on the way in which Project eARTh participants worked together and supported each other to produce the artworks:

*It was just lovely how somebody could do a design and then someone else stitched it. And there was one guy in particular who was really excited to see how his design looked when it had been stitched. I would showed him it at the celebration day and he was just really chuffed that it just like he wanted.*

*...it's about working together....it's the sum of the parts that creates the whole. Whatever small contribution you give, you can feel great about that, because actually, that has helped create the whole thing...it does depend on them working together and helping each other out.*

*What's lovely about that group is they encourage each other to do things. So, that's part of it as well...it does rely on individuals within that group to help each other out.*

In some commissions, participants also had the opportunity to make small artworks to take home.

*...actually, they preferred working on things for themselves...Which was quite nice.*



*Some people like to have something to take home and other people don't...But yeah, the little bird card was good. Some people took them home and hung them up; a couple of people made several more and have used them as cards to send to friends and family served as birthday cards and things.*

Artists obviously had an important role in bring the final artwork together. They clearly put a great deal of thought into designing a piece that was suited to the location where it would be displayed:

*...health and safety. You know, make sure there's no sharp wires sticking out of it, make sure everything's covered...that could cause a hazard and that it's not incredibly heavy for anybody to move around...Obviously, it couldn't be too big...the leaves are flexible as well.*

*I wanted to create little blocks that kind of flowed...They weren't all...right in the middle of the page, but the slightly off centre so it kind of created a flow...I just created about four or five blocks of these pictures that are hung together in a bit of a mishmash, but you could see how they all kind of belonged together in a way...it was quite subtle...*

Many commented that they were impressed with the ways in which the artworks had been displayed by community organisations:

*I thought it looked really stunning where it was, and especially because you can see it as you walk along the street. It looks really nice.*

*I think it looks good. It's really colourful. There was lots of lovely comments from the residents.*

Artists who had attended celebration events commented that these gave participants an opportunity to share the art they had created more widely within the local community:

*The people that were there were very proud of them. They were showing them to people that came...so that was brilliant.*

*It was good to see the Mayor and Mayoress there, and it made it feel more important and more worthwhile for them. It was a really nice thing to do, because otherwise it would have just ended...they wouldn't be able to all see the artwork for the first time and...celebrate it together.*

## **Artist development**

Artists developed skills themselves through involvement in Project eARTh. The most frequent response when asked what skills they felt they had developed was patience. This probably reflects the fact that, for most artists, Project eARTh is not like a 'regular workshop':

*It's not like a regular workshop where people come and want to do the activity; some people there, they don't, you know, necessarily fully engage with it.*

This meant that artists needed to be flexible in their approach, but also give clear instructions:

*...knowing that things can change every week...you might get eight people one week, and then the next week, we'll get 15...And managing people's expectations...And just making sure that I'm really clear with giving people instructions and giving them really clear timetables and things like that...*

*...it's always the group dynamic. It's essential for this, and it always changes depending on participants or how they're feeling or their input.*

The experience led several artists to reflect on how they might prepare for and facilitate workshops with similar groups in the future:

*...if people seem to be struggling...then I will direct them to do something like, "Well, can you do some sanding then and take the edges off this?"*

*I had to adapt it...for example, the fact that we couldn't ask people to make their own stencils meant that I had to do that. And it took quite a long time. So I just need to be more assertive with what kind of information I need before that starts.*

In some cases, working with Project eARTh encouraged artists to think about the types of activities with might like to work on, and ways in which they might like to work, in the future. Several said it had given them more confidence to do similar activities in the future:

*I feel that I've learned that I absolutely love working face to face...most of my life, I sort of sat on my drawing board...to actually do it with people, it's been amazing...So yes, I've learned that I enjoy doing that. But it's given me a bit more confidence as well. Because I was absolutely terrified when I went into it.*

*I'd worked in primary schools for an awfully long time. I've done bits of Project Earth [in the past], but over the last few years that with the schools being closed, I've sort of done more with Project eARTh and I definitely wouldn't go back to primary schools.*

*I think I'm going to use this as a way of thinking about how I work in other places...it felt like a good organisation to work with. What I can take from that...I can put in place in other places that maybe I feel a little bit more panicked about, or...doesn't have any structure...*

## Future involvement

All the artists interviewed were keen to work with Project eARTh again if there were opportunities to do so in the future.

*...they were just such a lovely group to work with it. When they were happy at the end of it, it just made me feel really good too. So it was good therapy.*

*...if there was an opportunity to work with them again, I definitely would. I just think everyone's really, really lovely. And the group's really nice as well.*

## Volunteer views

Most volunteers have a longstanding relationship with Project eARTh or HPCA more generally, for example, as a participant in Project eARTh or in HPCA projects over the last few decades. Several volunteers have moved back to High Peak after living elsewhere and felt that volunteering with Project eARTh helped them to re-establish connections in the local community:

*I moved back not long ago, and it was my way of getting involved in the community again.*

*Twenty years ago, I did some projects with HPCA...now I'm retired...and I've been thinking I still have skills and energy...*

Most volunteers had a strong interest in art and some also had previous experience of providing support in a variety of contexts:

*I love art. I love doing things with my hands...*

*I love the people contact, I do love supporting work with people. I've got a history of NHS and social work and stuff like that.*

Volunteers carry out, or assist with, a variety of tasks to support the workshop sessions:

*I'll basically bob around and do anything that I'm needed to do...Has the artist got everything they need?...Then it's kind of monitoring who might need help, who looks as though they're cracking on fine...It could be to reinforce what the artist's already told them, and then they might be happy to sort of run with it. Or it might be it's very difficult for them to kind of focus or have the confidence to make a start...or sitting with someone pretty much for the full session because of them feeling really kind of vulnerable...I'm happy to get involved and help somebody with their piece of work or come up with ideas...But it's really seeing what people need and not taking over. And just trying to support and encourage really...Then also I will get*

*involved in the tea and coffee break. And then if somebody just didn't want to work and they just want to chat, then I'll have a chat.*

Another volunteer also emphasised that it was not only a case of supporting with artwork, but also of taking time to engage with, and listen to, participants:

*...chat to them and make them make them feel that they're valued...somebody listens to their story.*

Several volunteers commented on the flexibility of volunteering with Project eARTh, both in terms of the project co-ordinator's willingness to work around other commitments they might have and in terms of the ways in which it was possible to support the project:

*I think no matter what your personality type...there's space for everybody. And that's what's so nice. You don't have to be great at art. I mean, I have got an art background, but it doesn't matter. Because the work that you're doing is accessible.*

## **Impact of the project**

From their perspective of observing participants, usually over a number of months or years, and often working with them on a one-to-one basis, volunteers identified a number of benefits of involvement in Project eARTh for participants. This included opportunities for social contact and interaction:

*I think sometimes it's the only social contact that they get. So I think the social contact and just being with other people seems very valuable to some people.*

*...they meet other people, they're not just sitting in their house. They can talk to me, talk to other volunteers and do things...when they chose to come to join in with the group...they talk to their friends and talk to strangers. I think that way they're confident as well to talk to artists, to talk to other people in the group...chat with friends and other people. I think this helps them...*

Whilst social contact includes simply having a chat over a cup of tea, attending Project eARTh also offers participants the opportunity to discuss more serious issues or concerns they might have:

*...even before the pandemic, but particularly so now...having that space to socialise and create and explore whatever feelings they may have going on...I think is really, really important.*

In particular, volunteers highlighted the benefits they felt participants gained from working together as a group to create artwork as a team:

*...a sense of people working together and creating something together is great, I think that can give you confidence...you've got a sense of a group achievement...a big source of that is teamwork. And I think that gives you a real sense of belonging.*

Volunteers also witnessed a sense of absorption in creative work amongst participants:

*...they've got the absorption of the work...I think it's that involvement in an activity and the focus and the structure. I think that can be very helpful to people as well.*

Volunteers themselves benefitted from a sense of belonging from being part of Project eARTh and working together, alongside participants:

*It's just that sense of supporting each other and getting back to that sense of community which is so valuable, I think...that sense of camaraderie and I think it's so valuable these days.*

More specifically, volunteers spoke about the sense of being useful and helping people, and the wider community, through involvement in Project eARTh:

*...you get a chance to communicate and speak with a range of different people, different backgrounds, and see how can being having the space to create can help.... I think having that experience as a volunteer to be able to have those conversations and help and see how much impact it can have is really good both for the participants and also the volunteers.*

*I feel really great that I do something useful.*

In addition, for those with an interest in art, there was the opportunity to be involved in different types of art and work with different media than they may have done previously:

*You get involved in a lot of different kind of creative things that you never would have done otherwise. I would never would have done metalwork or willow work and things.*

Volunteers also commented on benefits that they felt Project eARTh had for the wider community in High Peak:

*I think that larger community aspect is really important in both that it showcases to the wider community what's going on [and] in terms of that product is such an important part of the local area...I think that that kind of communal spark is really good... just kind of showcasing the talent and creativity that people have and how it can...be a benefit to the wellbeing.*

*[It's important to] erect or put it somewhere in a community so the community will be aware there are programmes such as this going on for the community.*



Volunteers interviewed did not have specific suggestions for changes to Project eARTh, but several said they would like to see the project expanded so more people in the local community could benefit.

## Feedback from community organisations

Feedback from organisations where Project eARTh art has been displayed this year was highly positive. Representatives from these organisations commented on the way in which the artworks had been designed to complement their space and the aims of their organisation:

*It's in prime position within our large community space, in direct view of the window, which is wonderful as we can share with the community, but it also complements our space really nicely... it's really impressive work and I personally feel quite privileged to be allowed to put it up in our building. It's great to showcase the work of other groups, especially ones we may refer clients to, and it really helps to make our space feel warm and inviting. (The Bureau, Glossop)*

*The artwork...fits perfectly. It is a physical reminder of the wide range of artistic events/groups that take place here, it also represents that we are part of the community and we are here for them as much as they are for us. As a charity and business that aims to bring a variety of Arts to the local community that are not available or accessible elsewhere so this tree from an organisation like HPCA arts fits well. (Spring Bank Arts, New Mills)*

*The remit was to use colours that fitted with our branding. The artwork did this in a simple and effective way....the artwork makes the room feel more welcoming and gives it character. (Zink, Buxton)*

*The design/art work clearly demonstrates that the design team understood our organisation's values and purpose. We love the wide range of ways "Incredible Edible" has been expressed in the ceramics. (Incredible Edible, New Mills)*

*As Christian organisations, we are committed to protecting our environment and finding ways to live more simply, with reference in particular to Pope Francis' encyclical 'Laudato Si'. We feel the artwork on display reflects so clearly the abundance and diversity of creatures and nature created by God, which we know we must protect from our damaging ways. The artwork also creates a 'feelgood' factor in the room, which is good for all of us! (St Anne's Parish Centre, Buxton)*

Furthermore, organisations reported that the artworks had received positive comments from their own clients or users:

*Residents have praised the piece and have said that it brightens up a dull space. (Whitfield House, Glossop)*

*The main feedback I have received from the artwork is that it is beautiful and a colourful addition, but what I think is more beneficial is that it has opened questions for people: What is it? Where did it come from? Who made it? What was the focus? What does it represent? Those types of questions all lead to talking about HPCA and our local community and art itself. (Spring Bank Arts, New Mills)*

*The feedback has been very favourable and our users are very happy with the artwork! Children's groups in particular, love the pictures. The artwork is often quite a talking point for new visitors to the centre too. Here are a couple of comments:*

*"The artwork in the hall really enhances the space. The children in our group comment on the colours and images. They all have their different favourites! We have even devised drama games using the artwork as our source" (Clare O'Neill, Mad Hatters Musical Theatre Group)*

*"The artwork in the hall makes the room feel more vibrant and welcoming. There is always something different to look at that you haven't noticed before! It really enriches the feeling in the room." (Community Choir member, St Anne's Parish Centre, Buxton).*

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to reflect on the wider impact of Project eARTh within the High Peak community more broadly, the following was posted on Facebook by the Deputy Mayor after attending a Project eARTh celebration event:

*[The Deputy Mayoress] and I were blown away by the incredible exhibition that displayed a variety of community arts projects. We were grateful to meet and have a good natter with the immensely talented [participants]... We had a lovely time celebrating this wonderful occasion with you all. I also want to say a very big thank you to [a participant] for kindly gifting this beautiful picture to the Deputy Mayoress and I. It's something that we'll both treasure. We have framed the picture and placed it on our mantelpiece back home.*

# Conclusions

This section outlines the ways in which Project eARTh has met its outcomes over the last year.

## **Bring people together and build strong relationships in and across communities**

Participants in Project eARTh stress the importance of coming together as a group and this has been even more important whilst Covid restrictions remained in place and many other activities or social gatherings had to stop. As Covid restrictions have eased during the course of the year, the groups have been able to operate more 'normally', making it easier for participants to make connections and enjoy the social benefits of attending. Many participants have established friendships through Project eARTh, and these often extend beyond the sessions themselves. At the end this evaluation period, in summer 2022, 67% of participants who completed survey had a higher 'score' for 'making connections' than they had done in autumn 2021, and 71% had a higher score compared to when they completed their baseline survey. Over the course of the evaluation period, there has been a statistically significant improvement in the extent to which participants have 'got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones'.

## **Improve the places and spaces that matter to communities**

Feedback from organisations where Project eARTh artwork has been displayed is highly positive. Representatives from these organisations were clearly impressed with the care taken to ensure that the artworks created enhance the spaces they use to work with members of the local community, as well as fitting with the aims of their organisation in terms of themes or approaches taken. In all cases, they report enthusiastic responses to the art from community members who engage with their organisation.

## **Enable more people to fulfil their potential by working to address issues at the earliest possible opportunity**

Project eARTh participants benefit from regular contact with the Project eARTh team, support workers and their peers in the groups. This provides a regular opportunity for participants to share their concerns and struggles, and better manage their wellbeing, than may otherwise be the case, especially when Covid restrictions were in place and participants report that other support services were not easily accessible. Comparing survey responses from autumn 2021 and summer 2022, there was a statistically significant improvement in participants feeling they were 'coping well with problems' and not needing 'the support of my doctor or other professionals'.

## **Participants report feeling less isolated by accessing meaningful activities and developing relationships**

For many participants, Project eARTh is the only social activity they take part in. Many describe how, without Project eARTh, they would feel extremely isolated. Comparing their baseline survey scores to those in summer 2022, there was a statistically significant improvement in the extent to which participants were 'taking part in other activities' and 'getting to know new people...making new friends or developing existing ones' during their time with Project eARTh.

## **Participants gain confidence and self-worth by learning new skills and working collectively to create art works for the community**

Participants gain a variety of skills through taking part in Project eARTh. This includes a wide range of artistic skills, including developing more familiar skills, such as drawing, as well as the opportunity to learn techniques new to many, such as glassmaking. The artists in Project eARTh take care to structure their sessions to allow participants with a wide range of artistic skill levels to learn something new. In addition to artistic skills, participants have learnt about nature; learnt about themselves and gained confidence; and developed organisational and self-management skills.

The act of working as a collective to create a work of art is one of the most important aspects of Project eARTh. In addition, the fact that the artworks created will be seen and enjoyed by the local community is a source of immense pride and supports participants' development of self-worth. Comparing participants' survey responses in summer 2022 to their baseline surveys, there was a statistically significant improvement in participants saying they feel 'good about myself, and my self-esteem is good' and have 'been feeling confident'.

## **Improvement and maintenance of psychological wellbeing of participants by regular involvement in positive creative activity.**

Amongst those participants who completed surveys, 79% had a higher 'wellbeing' score in summer 2022 than they had done in their baseline survey. Participants describe how Project eARTh supports their psychological wellbeing by providing distraction, relaxation, companionship and motivation. In addition the case studies demonstrate how Project eARTh can have a lasting impact on participants' wellbeing, for example, leading to them to undertake voluntary work or feel less likely to require more formal/medical support.

Participants reported feeling better after a Project eARTh workshop on 97% (New Mills) and 95% (Buxton) of occasions. For both groups, the average increase in their ratings (out of 10) before and after a session was statistically significant. Only 2% of participants used negative words to describe how they felt at the end of sessions, compared to 45% who did so at the start.

## **Participants report improved resilience by regular involvement in positive activities and developing relationships.**

86% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in summer 2022 than they had done in their baseline survey, and 75% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score at the end of the evaluation period in summer 2022 than they had done in autumn 2021. Project eARTh helps to provide participants with a support network to share concerns with, and also increases participants' awareness of other services and organisations within High Peak.

## **Recommendations for future years of Project eARTh**

Whilst the evaluation has shown highly positive results for the impact of Project eARTh on participants, as well as encouraging feedback from artists, volunteers and community organisations, the evaluation has identified some adjustments or considerations that may help to inform the development of the project in future years.

- Make sure artists have information about the groups (e.g. skills levels, specific needs) and ideally an opportunity to visit, prior to starting detailed planning of their commissions.
- If possible, arrange at least one joint sharing event each year to allow the Buxton and New Mills groups to meet and see each other's artworks.
- The decision about whether to continue with morning/afternoon sessions or return to a single group in each town is likely to depend on funding. There are pros and cons of both approaches: participants miss seeing people in the other session, but artists feel better able to provide support in a smaller group. Whichever option is taken, it will be necessary to consider the implications of this (e.g. making sure artists have sufficient support or holding joint celebration events so both groups in a town can meet on occasions).
- For the evaluation, although the comparison of baseline and follow up surveys showed highly promising results, in future years, it would be helpful to try to increase the number of participants completing surveys which could then be compared.