



Project eARTh evaluation

EVALUATION REPORT 2022-23

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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 over 13 years. The project's usual format is to run two weekly groups, one in New Mills and another in Buxton. Inevitably, the Covid 19 pandemic altered Project eARTh's ability to run its planned programme over the last few years. Until the end of July 2022, the project was therefore still running with two smaller groups per week in each town to be more Covid-secure, with additional increases in costs incurred. From September 2022, the format returned to the pre-Covid pattern of one group per week in each town.

During the 2022-23 project year, there were 33 participants (5 men, 28 women) who stayed for longer than one session in New Mills, whilst in Buxton, there were 42 participants (10 men, 32 women) who attended more than one session. Therefore, in total, there were 75 participants (15 men, 60 women).

Projects June 2022 – May 2023

This evaluation report includes projects carried out within the year June 2022 to May 2023. These are described below by the project co-ordinator, Alison Bowry.

Seed Exchange

The Buxton group completed its Seed Exchange, started in the previous year. In this project, participants worked with artist Roisin O' Connor to make ceramic vegetables, fruit and flowers for a 'Seed Exchange' structure for Buxton's Serpentine Community Garden project. The Celebratory Event planned for September had to be postponed due to the funeral of Queen Elizabeth, and as the artist had moved to London to study, could not be held until December 2022. The Seed Exchange has a wonderful indoor location in The Pavilion Gardens in Buxton, with its large footfall of residents and visitors. The group also made some ceramic bilberry bumble bees for the Friends of Buxton Station.



Cyanotypes – Framed Collages

The New Mills group worked with artist Lucie Maycock on a project to make cyanotypes, which were then used to create framed collages for Arden House GP surgery in New Mills. This is the surgery attend by some of the group, who were keen to make artwork for the setting.





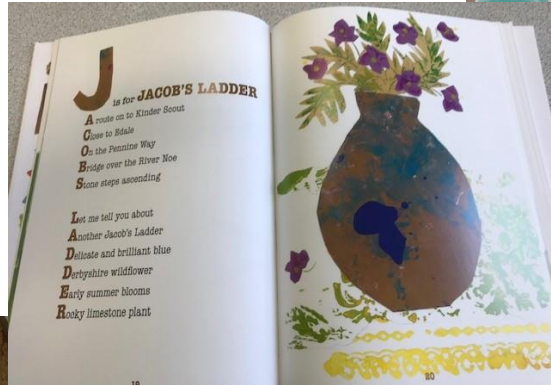
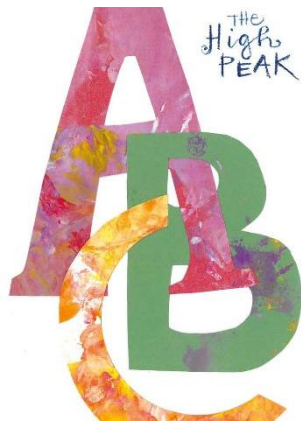
Shadow Puppets

In late June and through July, the Buxton group worked with artist Tara Saunders from 'Babbling Vagabonds Theatre Company' on a shadow puppet project. This was for fun amongst ourselves rather than sharing in the wider community – and was thoroughly enjoyable making up stories, puppets, and sound effects, and then acting them out. Outside some people's comfort zones, but all got involved and surprised themselves!



High Peak ABC

New Mills Project eARTh got involved in High Peak Community Arts' 'The High Peak ABC' book project in July 2022, by writing acrostic poems for the High Peak places and names chosen for the book. The group wrote poems in a session led by artist Carl Harris. The project grew out of HPCA's early year's programme, 'For The Love of Books' and created an ABC with collage illustrations by local artist Andrea Joseph using paper painted on by babies and toddlers in early years' workshops. The book was launched in April 2023 with poet Helen Mort and is for sale online and in local bookshops, as well as being given to libraries and schools.



Light Within

The New Mills groups worked with photographer Josh Tomalin and dancer Courtenay Cruse on a photography project in July. Participants photographed Courtenay as she danced, using 35mm film, and suggested moods, emotions and ideas for the dance. They also wrote some short pieces inspired by the dance. Everyone found it a most relaxing and uplifting day. The negatives and b/w photos printed onto clear film were then used to create light box style sculptures, and a celebratory event was held in September as part of New Mills Festival in which Courtenay performed a specially choreographed dance amongst the sculptures and read a poem using participants' words.





Cyanotype Cushions

In September/October, the Buxton group worked with artist Ruth Flanagan to make cyanotype collages, printed onto cushions. The group created 10 lovely cushions, which the steering group had chosen to give the Befriending Serve at Connex in Buxton as gifts for World Kindness Day for elderly and /or disabled Buxton residents. They also created individual cards to go with each gift.

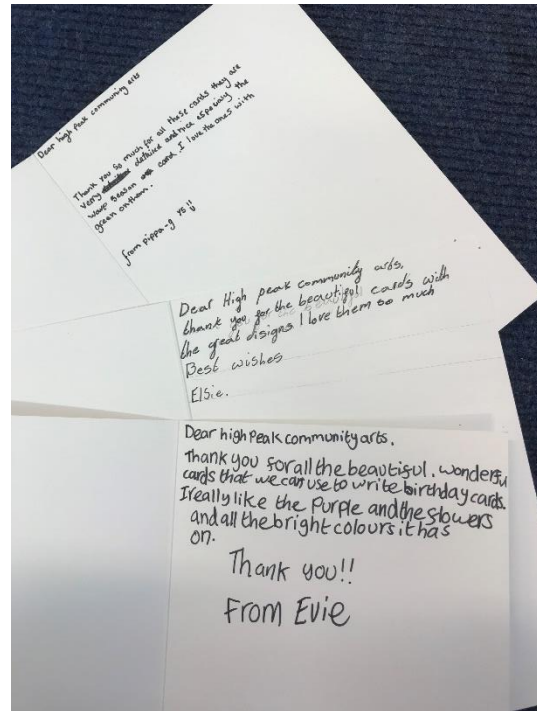


Book Sculptures

In September/October, the New Mills group worked with artist Kate Freeborough to create book sculptures through folding and cutting pages of old hardback books. The final result was a fantastic and large collection of book sculptures shown at a Saturday event at Spring Bank Arts and then displayed in the windows of a local Insurance firm (where are still on show today).



Both groups worked with writer Leanne Moden on creative writing on the nature of hope. (Buxton in October/ November; New Mills in January/February). Leanne then collated writing from the participants into two group poems, together with illustrations by the groups. Two sets of A3 poetry posters were created and printed. Participants have each taken home posters, and distributed others to GP surgeries and community venues in their own neighbourhoods.



Silk Painted Banners and Flags

Both groups worked with artist Sara Blackburn to create silk painted banner and flags for local organisations – Buxton from January to March for [Buxton Festival Fringe](#), Buxton Pride Picnic and Poole's Cavern and Country Park; and New Mills in March – May for the Rock Mill Centre and the One World Festival – resulting in an array of brightly painted artwork to celebrate in early June! The banners were much appreciated by the organisations.





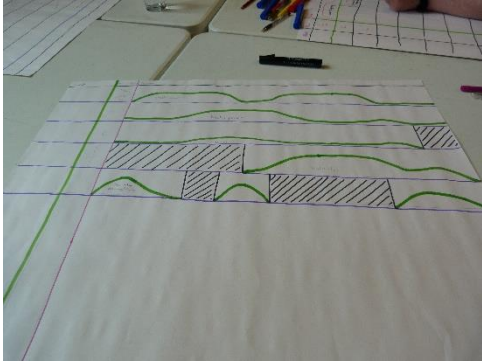
Mosaics for Townend Community Garden

In March, the Buxton group started working with artist Tracey Cartledge on making two 750 mm circular mosaics for Townend Community Garden in Chapel-en-le-Frith – on the gardening theme of flowers, fruit and vegetables. The group started with drawing, moved to collages and designs, then practised with soft mosaics, before starting with glass tesserae for the final pieces. The project will continue into July 2023.



Sounds that Soothe

Towards the end of the year, the New Mills group started working with artist Ian Pringle to create soundscapes of relaxing sounds. This project will continue into July 2023.



Evaluation methodology

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/autumn 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. In 2022-23 an exit survey was added for participants who leave the project to capture information about their reasons for leaving and future plans.

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

Three workshop sessions were observed (1 New Mills, 2 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 at New Mills in autumn 2022 and spring 2023. 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 Buxton and one former participant 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. Seven artists were interviewed by phone or online.

g. Interviews with volunteers and support workers

Five Project eARTh volunteers and one support worker 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

Organisations 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. Eight 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 at the end of the 2022-23 project year in relation to participants' baseline. In addition, participants' baseline responses are compared to those when they had been coming to Project eARTh for 6, 12, 18, 24 and 30 months.

Quantitative data

End of 2022-23 project year compared to baseline

In total, 24 participants completed both a baseline survey when they started with Project eARTh and a follow up survey during the last 6 months of Year 3 of this evaluation cycle (December-May 2023). Of these, 20 were from New Mills and 4 from the Buxton group. The time between participants' baseline and final survey ranged between 6 months and 30 months. 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 confident
- I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good
- I've been feeling anxious or depressed
- I have been feeling motivated
- I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful
- I have been feeling relaxed.

The change between the baseline and final follow up surveys was statistically significant for the following statements:

- 'I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones' (p<0.01)

- I've been taking part in other activities ($p<0.01$)
- I feel part of the local community ($p<0.05$)
- I have been feeling motivated ($p<0.01$).

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	Incomplete survey	Mean difference
I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones	4	15	5	0	1.04*
I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people	5	9	9	1	0.26
I've been taking part in other activities	5	13	6	0	0.63*
I feel part of the local community	3	11	9	1	0.48*
I've been feeling confident	4	9	10	1	0.39
I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good	4	9	10	1	0.35
I feel like I've been coping well with problems	8	5	11	0	-0.04
I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals**	9	7	7	1	-0.22
I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing	7	4	13	0	-0.21
I have been feeling anxious or depressed**	5	6	12	1	0.26
I have been feeling motivated	3	13	7	1	0.65*
I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful	4	9	11	0	0.25
I have been feeling relaxed	4	10	10	0	0.42

Table 1: Baseline and follow up survey during final 6 months of evaluation cycle (* statistically significant;

**reversed scale)

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

- 65% of participants had a higher ‘making connections’ score in the final follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 35% of participants had a higher ‘confidence and resilience’ score in the final follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 61% of participants had a higher ‘wellbeing’ score in the final follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

This report marks the end of the 3-year period since Project eARTh participants first started to complete baseline surveys. The following section therefore draws together findings from follow up surveys completed during this period to explore the impact of Project eARTh after 6, 12, 18, 24 and 30 months’ attendance. In each case, the results of the baseline and follow up surveys were compared using matched pairs t-tests. The first surveys were completed when strict Covid restrictions were in place and it is acknowledged that circumstances have changed considerably as restriction gradually eased before being removed completely. When interpreting these findings, it is therefore important to bear in mind that participants’ responses may well have been influenced by external factors over the last three years. It is also worth noting that some participants had already been attending Project eARTh for a number of years at the time they completed their baseline.

6 months compared to baseline

In total, 34 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 6 months later. Of these, 21 were from New Mills and 13 from the Buxton group. There was statistically significant evidence of an improvement between the following statement in the baseline and 6-month follow up surveys:

- I have been feeling anxious or depressed ($p < 0.05$).

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for ‘making connections’; ‘confidence and resilience’; and ‘wellbeing’:

- 44% of participants had a higher ‘making connections’ score in the 6-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 41% of participants had a higher ‘confidence and resilience’ score in the 6-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 59% of participants had a higher ‘wellbeing’ score in the 6-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

12 months compared to baseline

In total, 22 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 12 months later. Of these, 10 were from New Mills and 12 from the Buxton group. At this point, there was statistically significant evidence of an improvement between the following statement in the baseline and follow up surveys:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones ($p < 0.01$).

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing':

- 61% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the 12-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 55% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 12-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 52% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the 12-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

18 months compared to baseline

In total, 33 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 18 months later. Of these, 18 were from New Mills and 15 from the Buxton group. At this point, there was statistically significant evidence of an improvement between the following statements in the baseline and follow up surveys:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones ($p < 0.01$)
- I've been taking part in other activities ($p < 0.01$)
- I have been feeling anxious or depressed ($p < 0.05$)
- I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful ($p < 0.05$).

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing':

- 59% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the 18-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 59% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 18-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 73% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the 18-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

24 months compared to baseline

In total, 20 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 24 months later. Of these, 12 were from New Mills and 8 from the Buxton group. At this point, there was statistically significant evidence of an improvement between the following statement in the baseline and follow up surveys:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones ($p < 0.01$).

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing':

- 60% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the 24-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 45% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 24-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 55% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the 24-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

30 months compared to baseline

In total, 10 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 30 months later. Of these, 9 were from New Mills and 1 from the Buxton group. At this point, there was statistically significant evidence of an improvement between the following statements in the baseline and follow up surveys:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones ($p < 0.01$)
- I feel part of the local community ($p < 0.05$)
- I've been feeling confident ($p < 0.05$)
- I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good ($p < 0.05$).

When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing':

- 80% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the 30-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 40% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 30-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 70% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the 30-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

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. For a number of participants, Project eARTh was the only social activity (or one of very few) they take part in.

I'm only in touch with my sister who lives in another country. Project eARTh is the only activity I come to. I only feel part of the community when I come here.

Live with sister. Not leaving the house except for Project eARTh and medical appointments.

I would love to say that High Peak Community Arts has been my lifeline, if it was not for the group I would not even get dressed any more. I would give in on everything I do.

I would not see other people if I didn't come here, other than family.

However, in contrast to previous years when Covid-19 restrictions had severely impacted on social activities, the majority of participants were now taking part in some other activities in addition to Project eARTh:

I like to go walking. I coach gymnastics. I spend a lot of time with my boyfriend and family.

I see a lot of my family and friends. I am starting to get out more and I hope to join an adult education course to improve my maths and English.

Nevertheless, Project eARTh continued to be an important part of their week and several commented on the way in which Project eARTh participants (or former participants) had become friends and often supported each other both within and outside the sessions:

I keep in touch with one friend I made through the project (who no longer comes to the group) by phone. We chat regularly.

Due to personal reasons and health problems I was unable to attend Project eARTh for a while, and I felt its loss. However, the group kept supporting me by keeping constantly in touch and bringing materials to me so that I could work from home.

I have made some new friends by coming to the group.

I love going to Project eARTh, it makes me feel happy and like meeting people there and I love the staff. They are all kind and helpful.

Confidence and resilience

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

Due to being housebound for 16 weeks I became less confident, more depressed and my social anxiety increased. When I was able to be more physically reunited with the group I slowly gained a bit more confidence and I'm more able to attend social situations with the group's support.

I do feel much better in myself for being more social and joining groups/activities.

Struggling a bit, adult son is away. Good to come to group as it's social - relieves loneliness. Coming to group does improve my confidence!

My confidence has improved over time. Over the last few months I've been feeling more confident along with my self-esteem. I certainly have the ability to deal with issues on my own. Not really in need of any support from GP, support worker or social worker (only a bit of help from family at times).

Attending the group is improving my self-esteem and will be a fixture in my diary as something to look forward to.

There is a clear sense of pride in the artwork produced. This was evident in the way that participants shared their artwork and talked about their contribution to the finished pieces at the celebration events, but was also reflected in participants' comments:

Working collaboratively on public works of art was fantastic for my self-esteem.

I love to learn new skills. It's a good feeling to achieve a level of work that makes you feel good.

Wellbeing

Many participants commented on ways that Project eARTh supported their wellbeing.

I always feel good when I do a good workshop or project. I don't really get depressed or anxious during Project eARTh. I'm motivated every day during Project eARTh and outside of Project eARTh. Going to Project eARTh makes me happy and feel good.

For the time I'm here, I clear my head. I don't think about my problems when I'm here.

A frequent comment was that attending Project eARTh helped participants to feel more relaxed:

I feel safe and relaxed in class. It gives me a sense of wellbeing that I rarely have elsewhere.

I relax in art [group] more than any other place.

A number commented on the importance of art in supporting their wellbeing. Attending Project eARTh allowed, or encouraged, participants to take part in arts activities that they were not able to at home without materials and/or support:

I really enjoy being creative, it is something I wouldn't do at home because I have no tools or materials to use.

I don't have a good imagination but with the support at Project eARTh I'm able to create things that I'm proud of.

I look forward to coming to the group and always give the activity a go. I've surprised myself by what I have achieved.

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 a Project eARTh session.

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 the 2022-23 sessions as a word cloud. The most frequently mentioned words were 'okay', 'good' and 'anxious'. Overall, 39% of participants used negative words to describe their feelings at the start of the session; 26% used neutral words (e.g. ok); and 35% used positive words (perhaps in anticipation of the session in some cases).

As well as using words to describe their feelings, participants are asked to rate their mood on a scale of 1-10 at the start and the end of each session. The following section analyses the responses from each group.

New Mills

Overall, New Mills participants reported feeling better after the workshop on 96% of occasions. The average difference in their ratings (out of 10) before and after a session was 2.9 (a statistically significant difference, $p < 0.01$). The average difference ranged from 1.7 to 3.9.

For all sessions, there was evidence of a statistically significant difference between 'before' and 'after' scores (participants felt better after). In 59% 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?
9 th June 2022	14	93%	2.4	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
16 th June 2022	12	100%	3.4	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
23 rd June 2022	15	93%	2.1	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
30 th June 2022	15	100%	3.3	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
7 th July 2022	18	100%	2.4	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
14 th July 2022	11	82%	1.7	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
21 st July 2022	15	100%	3.3	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
28 th July 2022	8	100%	3.1	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
8 th Sept 2022	14	86%	2.7	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
15 th Sept 2022	11	91%	2.5	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
22 nd Sept 2022	16	94%	3.0	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
6 th Oct 2022	10	100%	3.1	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
13 th Oct 2022	12	92%	2.5	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
20 th Oct 2022	19	100%	3.1	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
10 th Nov 2022	11	100%	3.5	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
17 th Nov 2022	14	100%	2.9	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
24 th Nov 2022	9	100%	2.9	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
1 st Dec 2022	12	92%	2.9	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
8 th Dec 2022	17	82%	1.7	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
15 th Dec 2022	11	91%	2.5	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
12 th Jan 2023	18	100%	2.9	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
19 th Jan 2023	11	100%	3.5	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
26 th Jan 2023	18	100%	2.7	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
2 nd Feb 2023	12	100%	3.0	Yes ($p < 0.01$)

9 th Feb 2023	11	82%	2.1	Yes (p<0.05)
9 th Mar 2023	6	83%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
16 th Mar 2023	9	89%	3.9	Yes (p<0.01)
30 th Mar 2023	8	100%	3.0	Yes (p<0.01)
20 th Apr 2023	12	100%	3.9	Yes (p<0.01)
27 th Apr 2023	11	100%	3.7	Yes (p<0.01)
18 th May 2023	15	100%	3.5	Yes (p<0.01)
25 th May 2023	5	100%	3.8	Yes (p<0.01)
All sessions	400	96%	2.9	Yes (p<0.01)

Table 2: New Mills session feedback

Buxton

Overall, Buxton participants reported feeling better after the Project eARTh activity on 89% 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 0.7 to 2.9.

For all sessions bar one, there was evidence of a statistically significant difference between ‘before’ and ‘after’ scores (participants felt better after). In 21% 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 ¹	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
6 th June 2022	21	88%	2.4	Yes (p<0.01)
13 th June 2022	16	100%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
20 th June 2022	17	87%	2.1	Yes (p<0.01)
27 th June 2022	9	100%	1.9	Yes (p<0.01)
4 th July 2022	12	90%	2.4	Yes (p<0.01)
11 th July 2022	14	90%	1.9	Yes (p<0.01)
25 th July 2022	17	87%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
12 th Sept 2022	12	73%	1.0	Yes (p<0.05)
26 th Sept 2022	17	87%	1.5	Yes (p<0.05)
3 rd Oct 2022	13	90%	1.9	Yes (p<0.01)
10 th Oct 2022	13	100%	2.0	Yes (p<0.01)
17 th Oct 2022	15	92%	2.5	Yes (p<0.05)
7 ^h Nov 2022	14	92%	1.8	Yes (p<0.01)
21 st Nov 2022	21	90%	2.7	Yes (p<0.01)

¹ Participants giving a ‘before’ rating of 10 are excluded as they are unable to give a higher ‘after’ score.

28 th Nov 2022	16	83%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
12 th Dec 2022	14	100%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
9 th Jan 2023	15	92%	2.9	Yes (p<0.01)
16 th Jan 2023	15	92%	2.5	Yes (p<0.01)
23 rd Jan 2023	13	89%	2.1	Yes (p<0.01)
30 th Jan 2023	12	100%	1.8	Yes (p<0.01)
6 th Feb 2023	15	92%	2.1	Yes (p<0.01)
13 th Feb 2023	17	93%	2.5	Yes (p<0.01)
6 th Mar 2023	17	60%	0.7	No
13 th Mar 2023	20	88%	2.5	Yes (p<0.01)
20 th Mar 2023	22	89%	1.8	Yes (p<0.01)
27 th Mar 2023	18	100%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
17 th Apr 2023	10	88%	2.1	Yes (p<0.01)
24 th Apr 2023	12	91%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
15 th May 2023	10	88%	1.8	Yes (p<0.01)
All sessions	437	89%	2.1	Yes (p<0.01)

Table 3: 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:

The poem writing was fantastic

Making a paper flower. I liked the step-by-step instruction

Using different mediums. Eg. pastel, charcoal.

Doing designs for silk painting.

Others commented on the social elements of the session, in particular the supportive nature of the group and having an opportunity to discuss any issues if they wanted to:

Socialising with friends

The friendly atmosphere, the chance to feel free to discuss issues

Being with people who know how I feel. Supported.

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

Being together. The atmosphere and all the care given to everyone

Chilling with the group, even though having a bad day

Painting the silk was very therapeutic and calming. Very 'zen'.

The calm atmosphere.

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

Learning something new again

Collage work I have never done before

Learning and having a go at a new craft.

In addition, for many, there was a sense of pride in what they had achieved at the end of the session:

How my work turned out, they both looked stunning

How my work on poems turned out

How my work looks good.

When asked what they had **disliked**, some participants, particularly in the Buxton group, commented on the noise levels in the group at times:

Too loud, sensory issues

Too noisy.

In addition, several participants commented that they did not like messy activities or art techniques where they might get dirty:

I don't like dirty art so I dislike charcoal.

Some participants mentioned some of the art techniques that they had found challenging or felt frustrated with because they couldn't do them as well as they would have liked to:

Disappointed in self for being too heavy handed with gutta.

I didn't really feel like making a collage.

Nervous of taking the photographs.

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

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

How to make pictures for photographic design and printing

To paint on silk and merge colours

Loads about sound and microphones. Fascinating. So interesting.

How to use the cutter to cut keystones.

A lot about the difference in appearance of wet/dry paint

Others commented on how some of the sessions and helped them to take a more relaxed approach to art:

To think laterally and not over think – to let go.

Not to stress if can't access a bit of project and just do own thing for a bit.

Staying calm, relaxed, not fussing being sensible.

Relaxing, being spontaneous, letting ideas happen.

Future projects

Amongst participants who suggested ideas for the future, collage, felting and watercolour painting were the most popular responses. However, participants suggested a range of ideas as illustrated in Figure 3.



Fig 3: Word cloud of ideas for the future

Project organisation

From September 2022, Project eARTh returned to its pre-Covid model of one session per week in each town. Some participants had struggled to adjust to being in a larger group, in particular with the increased noise levels that resulted:

Because it's such a big group, the noise level's gone up. Other people's noise is a stress trigger for me. So that's been a little bit difficult...I'm not saying that I need individual attention, but sometimes it feels a little bit like the tutor is pulled in so many different directions. It's hard sometimes to actually get that little bit of feedback or support...that is one thing I've struggled a bit with. Last year, it was easier because it was a smaller group.

Other participants enjoyed being part of a larger group once more, but acknowledged this could be challenging for artists to manage:

It's better being back as one big group, but there can be problems finding artists who can deal with such a big group. Some artists are more comfortable with smaller groups and some activities are easier with smaller groups. It can be hard for the artist to get round to everyone.

During 2022-23, Project eARTh expanded the range of artists commissioned to work with groups. As a result, many artists were working with Project eARTh participants for the first time. Inevitably, it takes time for an artist to become familiar with a group; however, a number of participants felt that whilst some artists were a good fit for the group, others demonstrated less awareness of the needs of participants:

I wasn't keen on doing [the artform], but [the artist] was very good at leading the group, giving us ideas and facilitating...

Telling us: 'Do this, do that' shows a lack of respect and makes you feel like a kid.

Another challenge was balancing the needs of newer participants, perhaps with limited experience of creative projects, and more established participants who have been attending Project eARTh for a number of years and wanted commissions to build on (rather than simply repeat) skills they had gained from previous projects. There could also be different opinions about the extent to which sessions should be about developing artistic skills or be focused on wellbeing and relaxation:

It didn't feel like we learnt much. It felt like there was no progression from start to end

I was disappointed there wasn't more on technique – it was more like a wellbeing or mindfulness course or a warm up activity

There wasn't much diversity in the processes; we'd learnt a lot of the techniques before. I'd have liked more tuition.

With art forms that are less familiar to participants (e.g. poetry or cyanotypes), this appeared to be less of a problem.

Case studies

Case studies are 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. 'Louise' attended the New Mills group for a number of years before leaving when she found employment. 'Elaine' has been attending the Buxton group for a little over a year. 'Judy' has been attending the Buxton group for a year and has plans to move to a volunteer role in Project eARTh in the near future.

Louise

I had been receiving care at a hospice, where I took part in some art therapy, which I found extremely valuable alongside counselling. When I left there, I felt I've been given permission to do arty things, again: I didn't have to just do it with the kids, I could do it myself. I've always been a creative sort, but that's taken many forms. I did join a local art group where I live, but I was still feeling quite vulnerable and emotional at that point, so I wanted to do something that had a health recovery element to it. I came across Project eARTh as somewhere I could self-refer, which is exactly what I did.

When I joined the group, I immediately felt welcomed and comfortable. It was good being in a group where everybody's there for a [health-related] reason - although you didn't have to discuss it if you didn't want to, if you did want to, then you could. There were people there to talk to if I needed to, which I have done on occasions. I could just be myself, which is not always easy in a group. It was always relaxed. There was a wide age range as well, which was fantastic.

It was a very inclusive group, and everybody was helped to participate in whatever way they could or wanted to. There were some projects where I was happy to collaborate with others, but other times when I wanted to do my own thing and they always tried to try to accommodate that, which is very good. I went to Project eARTh for seven years. It was absolutely pivotal to my recovery from a life-threatening situation. I'm not the most social person, but I still have friends from that group now. I never felt that I didn't want to go for social reasons, which is quite an achievement for me. I was very comfortable chatting to all sorts of people if I wanted to, or not if I didn't want to. We could be as involved - or not - as we wanted. We could volunteer to help other people out as much as we wanted. I even though I was no longer a participant, I was still invited to join in things during lockdown. If there was a [Project eARTh at Home] pack to go out, then I got sent one as well and that just made me feel really included.

I've always been a musician, so music's always there, and I've always enjoyed art and drawing and making things. I've ambitions to try all sorts of different things, which is what I suppose I loved so much about Project eARTh. I got to try a whole load of new things, in particular the stuff that I can't do at home - like clay work. My background is to have a go anything and there were so many projects, but the one that sticks in my mind the most is the clay work. There's always the element of risk, the unpredictability of it [in the firing process], which I'm not a fan of. But it taught me to live with it a little bit. So it was quite good for me in that respect. I learned a lot of new things and I love to learn. I can't think of anything that I didn't enjoy.

Because it was in only term time, that was another massive thing for me because of my children. I didn't worry that I was missing out and I took them along a few times, which was absolutely lovely.

It's absolutely wonderful to know that what we were doing was for public benefit: it's part of the beautiful circularity of it all. That was what differentiates Project eARTh. Any art is good and fantastic: it's great to be creative and I did like every now and again that we could do something that we could make and take home and keep. But the fundamental idea is that you're doing something that is genuinely worthy to be in the public sphere. The community benefits from it: it's improving the environment and bringing that creativity into the environment, but done from a place of real meaning for the people that did the work. I'm not saying that a commissioned artist would be any different in that respect, but it's a very special group of people and there's just a beautiful circularity to it. I still wanted to contribute, but sometimes you can't. When you're not well enough, you don't have the capacity to go in and volunteer and do something, but this is a way of giving back, genuinely giving back, by giving your time and your thought and whatever you're capable of, in whatever way, shape or form.

I do a lot more arts now than before I attend to Project Earth. I tend to have a thing a year: just something small, whatever takes my fancy. Project eARTh gave me permission to do more of whatever I want to: things that I can do at home without too much expenditure.

Going to Project Earth was really a stepping stone to the job I'm in now because HPCA invited participants to join the steering group if we wanted to: interviewing artists, chatting about funding from time to time, and evaluations and all that stuff. That gave me a little bit of context for community projects, and really gave me confidence to move into the work that I'm in now.

I think it's a pretty perfect project!

Elaine

A few years ago, my husband had dementia and we moved here because my daughter was going to help look after him, but we'd only been here a short time and he died. I knew nobody here. I was stuck in the house on my own, no visitors, nothing. I just couldn't be bothered; I felt like there was no point in anything. A social worker came around and said, 'Would you like to go to the art group?'. I said, 'I can't draw really; I'm no good at art', but I thought I'd give it a try. And I've quite enjoyed it; I've done things that I've never done and never even thought about doing. And I like the company; there's a group of us that have got quite pally.

Project eARTh makes me get up in the morning, get showered and dressed, have something to eat, then come here. Otherwise, I would just stay in bed all day. It's either sit at home alone and do nothing or come here! It motivates me to come and I talk about it to other friends – there's loads of us stuck at home and we've got nobody. It's a long day when you're on your own. I enjoy coming to the sessions. I like the people; they're always welcoming when you come in.

I enjoy doing the art. I liked the silk painting best. I didn't think I'd be any good at painting, but it was good because you have the line - the gutter – so your paint doesn't spread out if you do it gently. So it always looks okay when you've done it. And then when you hold it up at the light, it all changes colour. I really enjoyed that. But I like all the end results, they're always good!

Judy

I moved to Buxton as the first Covid lockdown lifted, but then we went straight into lockdown two and I just didn't create a network. I was so isolated. I was finding it very difficult. Everything I'd planned to do when I moved over here just stopped. I became very, very isolated, very depressed. To be honest, I got to the point where I was really scared of actually going out; my confidence just went completely.

Then someone from social prescribing introduced me to Project eARTh. I am a crafter, so the activities appealed. I do cardmaking - I make cards and gift boxes. I used to do tapestries and crochet, but because of health problems, I'd stopped a lot of that. I saw a need to be able to do the activities that I like, but I'd be able to get out to meet friends in a safe environment. It sounded friendly and safe.

The first thing we did after I joined was wet felting and I really took to it. I clicked with the tutor and I just really enjoyed it. I was very much out of my comfort zone with creative writing, but I'm glad I did it because it taught me a few things about myself. I realised I could do something I didn't think I could, which was good. It's enabled me to get a few thoughts out onto paper that have been kicking around in my head.

What I found with Project eARTh is that I can switch off all the worries and thoughts and anxiety and I just go into a little happy space. I enjoy just sitting with this little group who all seem to sit together. Just sitting, doing simple things with a group of people who are also enjoying what they're doing is lovely.

There's just been one or two occasions when I've really not been able to take part in the activity because I'm in pain. But what I've found is that I can do something else, even if it's only taking teas and coffees out. Sometimes it helps me to work standing up, so I've now got a little space in the window where I can stand and work. So they've adapted things like that for me; they've done the absolute best so I can get involved. Health issues restrict what I can do, but I do needle felting outside the sessions, as a knock-on effect of the wet felting project. And I've introduced silk painting into my cardmaking a little bit.

I was very isolated, but through Project eARTh, I've made friends and they've extended beyond project now, which is really good. And it's introduced me to new activities, which in itself has

introduced me to more people. I still don't socialise a lot because of health problems, but socialising on Monday, is something to look forward to. It means I get out of the house; there's a bit of a purpose to the day.

I can't tell you how much better my mental health is than it was even a year ago. I'd been very, very depressed and I'd had counselling. I was in a really bad way. Joining the project gives me something to look forward to, something I enjoy, people I can talk to. I'm feeling very much more like I belong. I've actually got to the stage now where I'd like to stop being a participant and become a volunteer. I really like the idea of giving something back and helping people. I know where I was a year ago, so it's nice to think that I can have a little bit of a part in helping people feel better about things.

Former participants

In 2022-23 an exit survey was introduced for participants who had left the project. Four participants completed this survey. Three had left because they were now working, studying or doing other activities. One was now employed full time and another had moved into a new role at work and increased their hours. A further participant had moved from being a Project eARTh participant to being a volunteer with the project:

I moved from being a participant to now being a volunteer. Being a participant helped me to work on my mental health issues and now I've moved to being a volunteer for the project and connecting with the group and other volunteers...Being a volunteer boosts my self-esteem as I now feel that I'm in a position to support people in the group as I felt supported myself when I was a participant.

The fourth participant to complete an exit survey had left because they didn't feel well enough to attend, but would like to return when they felt a bit better.

Artist views

Artist feedback was gathered via online and phone interviews.

Involvement with Project eARTh

Whilst some artists had previous experience of working with Project eARTh or HPCA more broadly, for a number of artists leading workshops in 2022-23, this was their first experience of working with the organisation. Although some had local connections, several were based outside High Peak:

...it's really nice to find...something that was slightly outside of my bubble in terms of geography, and also in terms of the participant groups as well...

The majority of artists were supportive of the approach of involving Project eARTh participants directly in the artist selection process and some commented that this was a useful process for artists too:

...it was actually a really lovely experience, it was less of an interview and more of a conversation. And it was really nice to get to speak directly to some of the participants ahead of doing the work and getting a feel for who they were as people and where their interests lay and that kind of thing...it did feel very welcoming and warm and like a nice introduction to the project rather than like a scary interview.

I thought it was really nice. I was a bit nervous. But I believe it was really good having participants involved in that process. I thought that was a really good idea.

It was nice to speak to participants. And I really liked that because I'm a community artist myself, so I really appreciate the fact that the members and the volunteers were involved in that process. So that that kind of stood out for me during the interviews that it was really nice that they were part of that.

Planning workshops

When planning their commission, artists were aware of the need to be inclusive and ensure they could cater to differing needs of participants:

So I was thinking about what will be an accessible art form for people with different needs and different interests and abilities. So silk painting is pretty inclusive. There's different levels of difficulty. And also, you can prep for it in advance. So you can bring along pre-made stuff almost...it was kind of it sounded like the right art form to use.

...I am interested in the idea of creating collaborative pieces of writing with groups and particularly with groups who don't think of themselves necessarily as poets or as people who do creative writing, whatever that means...from the out, it was: this will be a collaborative piece of writing and this will be a poem that is that everybody contributes to.

Several artists had been commissioned a number of months before their project was scheduled to take place. In a few cases, this meant that plans changed from those presented initially, for instance, in response to the relaxation of Covid restrictions or to changes in their own practices or approaches to workshops.

One artist commented on the fact that, when they were planning sessions, they were careful to ensure that the activities did not feel like school:

...we did some different stuff around imagination and writing metaphors. Writing the colours of hope and what hope might smell like and taste like and...connecting something that is an abstract noun, like hope, to these very concrete things...Those are really important skills for poetry and for creative writing. But we sort of did them in a way that...made sense to them...I think if I had said, 'Okay, now we're going to do metaphors...' and made it quite school-y, I think that would have been very off putting a lot of the participants...

Participant skills developed

Artists highlighted a variety of skills that they felt participants had gained through involvement in the workshops. During the course of a commission, some artists commented on how they had witnessed participants' confidence in their own artistic skills develop:

So the first couple of sessions it was asking me and asking the volunteers...even just down to choosing colours, so I think they've got a lot more...independence and a lot more confidence in expressing their own artistic ability and choosing...you give them something, and now they draw it themselves, instead of asking what to draw, that's been really good. So...that last couple of sessions, people just sort of had free ability to just do what they wanted really. And that was really nice seeing people come up and do stuff...

...being able to look at something and have an idea of how that's going to work in an artistic sense with the process...in composition, in shapes that go together. And they really learned a lot through kind of trial and error. And it is one of those types of art forms that you have to play around with a lot...before you can come to the kind of conclusion of 'Right, that's what I need to do next time...'

In some cases, artists were aware that participants had carried on developing their art skills outside the sessions (for example, by looking for instruction videos online):

...some really took that individual sort of creativity to another level, went home and learned new skills...they learned that off their own bat.

Beyond artistic skills, artists also reflected on other skills they had witnessed and had supported participants to develop. This included teamworking, co-operation and patience:

I think some of the people...have started working together a little bit more...the team working has been quite good when they've had to do that...I've almost kind of encouraged people to do a bit of team working when they've wanted to just do their individual thing, particularly when someone else is struggling. You see somebody's got some skills, and they kind of just want to

sit on their own and do it [but] it's quite nice to pair them with people...I am impressed by the level of patience that they've shown. So I think that is something that they've developed...

I think they probably learned to be patient...you have to have a fair bit of patience with the process, and the outcome...you have to...wait for it to dry. And I think at first, a few people might have been a little bit put off by that. But...towards the end they got used to what the process was...I think patience, definitely working together and communication skills that were developed...Cooperation was a really important one...we had to be really patient and we had to be really cooperative with each other, which was really good.

...it's not just what they creatively do, what their output is, but it's the being together in a group to explore these creative processes together alongside each other, and to interact with people like myself...and the volunteers...That's really beneficial to everybody, as much as the process of creativity.

Other artists described the sense of achievement and confidence they had seen participants gain through doing something they had not thought they were capable of:

...there were people who learned that they could do something that they didn't think they were capable of, which I think is always a really lovely thing to be involved with...

...at the beginning, I was saying, 'This is what we're going to do'. And I think some of them felt that it was out of their grasp. So then, by the time we've got to the end...a lot of them were like, 'Oh, I didn't know I could do that'.

Support from volunteers

Artists appreciated the support they received from Project eARTh volunteers:

...I am very impressed with the way that the groups are run, I think it's really good too having all the volunteers; the volunteers are brilliant.

I just couldn't do it without them. Yeah, they're brilliant. It's so nice to have them.

Several commented that having volunteers on hand was especially valuable when working with a large group and who had previous experience of working with the participants:

I think that having so many volunteers, is really lovely in case of any sort of difficulties that might come up...If you go and do these kinds of facilitation projects, and it's just you and a room, and then something happens, that's really difficult to manage. So it's so nice to have like a gang of three or four people who are able to deal with that and who know the group a lot better than you do because they can sort of sweep in and deal with those kinds of problems.

I think I would have struggled on my own with all those people, honestly, with all the different things that you have to do. And I think that's probably true with any kind of art form. And a very in a large group of that kind of size. You do need other bodies to helping out, otherwise it just doesn't run very smoothly and people just get a bit fed up waiting.

...we have the volunteers that go there regularly, and know everybody, and obviously, as an artist coming in...you don't know everybody; you don't know their individual needs. And it's a lot to try to get to know everybody while also thinking about what everybody needs practically...It's really helped by the volunteers and the coordinators who know the individuals...

One of the artists pointed out that having previous experience of working with volunteers was useful in managing and supporting them in a way that worked best for the specific project and avoided the problem of volunteers being 'helpfully unhelpful', such as getting equipment out which was not needed:

...it really helps having the volunteers on specific duties. And because I'm used to working with volunteers, I am used to kind of asking things of them rather than expecting them to know. And I think that's the key. Because obviously, they've never done this before, so they're not going to know what I need them to do. So I did give quite specific instructions, which I think was really helpful.

Artworks created

For some of the artists, leading workshops to create an end product that would be a piece of public artwork was a new experience:

...all of the work I do is very process-based...And so that idea of having an outcome was quite new to me...that was a really interesting learning curve for me, the idea of having something not only as an end result, but almost like a product goes somewhere or is sold or whatever. That was a new part of it.

It's quite unusual for me actually...to propose somewhere for work to be shown permanently. I'm not used to working so product-focused or non-process based to be honest. So that was quite unusual for me.

Several artists described how they had worked with the Project eARTh co-ordinator to decide on an appropriate end product and location for the finished piece(s):

I think initially, I had in my head a big piece. But it may have made more sense when I chatted to [the Project eARTh co-ordinator] and the group that we did smaller pieces that were easier to

house. I think maybe that part of the plan, from my perspective in hindsight, I probably could have looked at in a little bit more detail: Where's it going to go? How big is it going to be?

For some artists, not having the degree of control they might be used to over a piece of art that was going to be seen publicly was something they found challenging:

...when you spent a long time prepping something and planning something, and you've got a vision for what you want to help this group producing and suddenly someone comes in throwing paint all over...And then you've got to present that. So that's something that I've struggled with a little bit... I think that I've had to, just accept certain standards and everything, which is absolutely fine...

In addition, artists needed to take care to ensure that everyone contributed to the final artwork in some way, which could be challenging to manage with larger group sizes:

...you want everybody's ideas, you know, as far as possible, to dictate the nature of the outcome, but that has its own limitations, because you can only produce a certain amount of final work. You know, there are limitations on what the outcome has to be.

Working with a group with very mixed artistic abilities and skills was another factor that could be challenging for artists in creating a finished, coherent artwork:

...it was mixed. So when I say that, I mean some people excelled...produced some amazing stuff and really, really took that individual sort of creativity to another level, went home and learned new skills...But then I think, from my perspective, what I'm not used to is people taking the word back home and adding to it materials that I probably wouldn't have encouraged them to use if they'd done it in the session.

It was varied in quality, you know, people have got different skills. And some people really struggled. But...because it's a group and a team piece, you've got the quality there.

Overall, however, all the artists interviewed were pleased with the artwork that had been produced by participants:

The quality of individual [pieces] was really great...as an artist coming into a community setting you have to not have any preconceived expectations of...what the artwork will look like, because it's really about the process. But I was really pleasantly surprised and delighted by how great some of the [art] was that has come out of it.

I thought the quality was brilliant, really good. Each individual piece had its own artistic quality and merit as well as the kind of combined pieces.

Artist development

Artists developed their own practice and gained valuable experience through involvement in Project eARTh. Several commented that the experience had pushed them to move out of their comfort zone and work in different ways. Through working with Project eARTh, some artists developed ideas and approaches that they would be able to use with other groups too:

...so I've gained a lot from the project. And it's made me develop as an artist and it's given me lot of confidence working with groups like that. And it's also helped me relax a little bit in terms of wanting everything to be perfect...

...it's really ignited that kind of passion for that kind of facilitation for me...I applied to do...my first ever talk at a Writers Conference, using this as one of my case studies, which is really, really lovely, and a really nice, confidence boosting activity for me...

I think it was a bit out of my comfort zone. I've worked in one organisation for a really long time...so coming to a completely new group who I didn't know and who didn't know, me was quite a challenge, actually. And it is good to know that that worked out...I'd say it's helped my confidence with trying new projects for different people.

I hadn't really done much work with...groups with lots of individual needs. So it's out of my comfort zone, for sure. And then I found it empowering too, because it's like, 'Oh, yeah, I can do this'. So on both sides of the coin, everyone's getting something from it, you know, the participants are feeling empowered, and me as a workshop leader feeling empowered.

I came away...with several different ideas from participants that I have actually used since with other groups...

Challenges experienced

A number of the artists had not worked with Project eARTh before and experienced challenges because the nature of the groups and their needs differed somewhat from other arts groups they had facilitated. In particular, the Buxton group had a large number of learning disabled participants this year. This meant that artists' initial plans had to be adapted, which could be time consuming and tricky to manage at times:

I feel that if I'd known the group like now...I would budget time completely differently...the half day prep has turned into more of a full day prep, because I have basically 25 to 30 individual people to consider, and people that finish things very quickly, and the people that don't want to do it and people that can't do it...the time that I had allocated, hasn't been enough to make

it feasible...So that's been really stressful...I've had to prep for three or four different activities to accommodate everybody. But then you never know what people are going to be able to do and what they're going to want to do.

...seeing the speed in which quite a lot of the participants work: Will they sustain an activity over the number of weeks we're anticipating? Or will they finish really quickly and then say, 'What's next?'... I think one of the hardest challenges of this is the ratio of contact time and prep time. And it's really difficult...the balance [as I originally planned it] isn't quite right...there's a lot of work in gathering materials for each session. Every different activity requires quite a lot of preparation work...as well as preparing for each session, there's also the design work has to happen in the background.

Some artists described how they had tried to address this challenge through having a variety of activities or ways for participants to engage with the project:

...when I go along to something, I always have backups and other stuff that I take with me in case because everyone works at different speeds. I find that that's one of the most challenging things: when everyone's working at different pace, I have to have fairly different things that I can pull out for the various people.

...I started the process of giving each table, something to do because the tables were going at different paces...from a facilitator's point of view, it's all about making sure I'd planned lots of different ideas, and then being reactive enough to say, 'Okay, well, these guys have finished this, so what can we do that follows on from this?' And that was a really fun challenge to get things going.

I think one thing about this project, and probably any projects I do, because of my experience, is there's a lot of differentiation in there...I think there was scope for people to take it as far or as basic as they need to, which I think was the strength of it.

In particular, the size of the groups was also something that artists had found challenging and had needed to adapt their practice to accommodate:

Well, for me, one of the main challenges was the fact that the groups are really large...I usually cap it at about 15. That's the maximum that you can really get to grips with...

...it was quite big numbers. I'm used about half that in an adult group. So I...quite quickly realised that the idea of having lots of discussions as a group wasn't going to work. So I adjusted that. So rather than the whole group talk, I'd go around to individual tables, and really focus on the activities...

...it requires a lot of constant thinking and problem solving. How you can keep everybody happily occupied and contributing in a valid way to the project whilst managing the numbers?

As several of the artists were based outside High Peak, travelling time to workshops was a factor.

Artists who had worked with groups in both towns commented on differences between the two groups:

I found that the majority of people in the Buxton group wanted to work individually...and that really affected what we did, and also really affected the amount of time that I was required to put into it...because they have slightly different needs. The people in New Mills, some of them...really do want to work together...there's been shared ideas, and they've wanted to sit down and do something as a group project. And it's been about creating the pieces a bit more, as opposed to...quite a lot the time in Buxton, it's been kind of occupying people and making sure that everybody's got something to do. And there's been lots of different people with different needs and different abilities. So that's been very challenging...I don't think the two groups can really be considered as the same [in terms of] input needed....

Future involvement

Artists interviewed said they would encourage other artists to work with Project eARTh.

...they do fantastic work and the group is brilliant and the fact that they've got 30 people with those range of needs all doing the same sort thing and doing very well...is amazing. And I haven't seen anything as successful as that. So they're doing a fantastic job.

I think there's so much about this project, like this [evaluation interview] for example, doesn't normally happen in other work. The amazing journal of what happened - incredible to have it properly documented like that; it's really lovely and important as well to look back on. But I think just generally, the participants have a real ownership of what's happening in the project, it's not just for them, you know, they're just involved at every level, which is how it should be.

However, they felt it was important that any artists working with Project eARTh had a good understanding of the group before starting the commission to allow them to prepare activities to meet the differing needs of participants, whilst remaining flexible within the sessions:

...having a real mix of ability, and being aware of that, and also asking them to give themselves more time than they might for a different group to do the same sort of thing.

I think maybe if you're a freelance artist that have never done workshops before, it might be more challenging. I think that the first session would be a massive learning curve for you, but I don't know how else you could prepare someone for that other than to actually physically do

it. Or maybe observe somebody else doing it before you get to do it...I think the key is just to be as flexible as you can with what you're trying to do.

... if I'd come and hung out with the group in someone else's workshop before I started, that would just have given me a bit more of a heads up about what to expect.

I would advise them to try and stay as flexible as possible so that they can react to what happens and work with the outputs of each session as much as possible.

In terms of additional support from HPCA that might be useful, artists suggested having more support with planning and having an in-house bank of activities for participants to do if they had finished the artist-led activity before the end of the session:

...maybe it would be good to have a planning session in between the different participation sessions....sometimes when I'm trying to plan how to do things for the following week, or how to fill in bits of time in between stages and what would be the most beneficial way to do it, actually, sitting down together to discuss that would be really helpful. You know, everybody could perhaps contribute to the ideas.

I think it'd be really good if there was...a second activity to do...an in-house activity. So then when people finished, it wasn't like people coming up and going, I've done this now what can I do?

Volunteer views

Many volunteers have a longstanding relationship with Project eARTh or HPCA more generally, for example, as a participant in Project eARTh or other HPCA projects over the last few decades. However, this year several volunteers have been recruited through social media and some have supported Project eARTh on a more short-term basis, for example, whilst taking a career break:

I've been following them [HPCA] on Facebook and I was looking for something that would give me some time with other people, because I work at home a lot of the time, and I had some spare time. And I thought, 'I want to be out and with other people. I want to be doing something creative or involved in the arts or with creative people doing arts things, because that's something I'm interested in'.

Volunteers carry out, or assist with, a variety of tasks to support the workshop sessions including providing both practical and emotional support for participants:

The baseline is that we just make people welcome when they arrive. And generally chat with anybody new to make them feel welcome and relaxed. It's always a lovely atmosphere, but people will feel quite apprehensive when they first arrive...We do the teas and the coffees and biscuits...it's very much if somebody's kind of looking uncertain in some way, then just to gently kind of reassure them. If anybody's not sure about what to do...or not feeling confident and happy. So gently sit alongside them just kind of just adapt the depending on what people's needs are really. Just to enable them to take part in the workshop and to feel a part of it really...

So the practical side is setting up the room, tables and chairs...the teas and coffees as well...but also it's the welcoming people, 'Hi, how you how you doing?'...Sometimes, people just want to have a little bit of a chat about how they're feeling...kind of listening to people, encouraging people...

Impact of the project

From their perspective of observing participants, usually over a number of months or even 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. For many, Project eARTh was seen to provide a safe space and a sense of security that allowed participants to relax and also to share how they were feeling:

...it's amazing, this sense of security that's developed for people who've been coming a while...you can see that they do just relax. That sense of acceptance when they arrive...So to me, that's the big thing, feeling that there are workers who you can trust, I think that's a big thing for them. You can relax and be yourself and not feel any pressure. So that sort of environment. It's very precious to the people.

They connected with each other and were sort of opening up about things. And equally, we would make those connections with them as well...

Several volunteers commented on the fact that participants would often still attend Project eARTh even if they were not feeling well or were experiencing difficulties. In these instances, volunteers would try to find ways to support individuals and adapt to how they were feeling on that day:

...there were some days where people would come in and say, 'I'm here, but not feeling very talkative'...Sometimes they'd ask for one person to sit next to them and we'd make it happen for them, because the fact that they'd come in was a huge thing for them if they've had a bad weekend. And that was very lovely as well to see because it obviously means something to them that they're coming in. And even when they're finding things tricky, they know that by

coming in, they're going to feel better when they leave. So it's making it so that it's accessible for them if they are finding it hard.

...one of them wasn't feeling very well today but it was just lovely sitting with her friends and seeing what was happening and things like that...it's a safe place for them I think...they enjoy being with their friends and it is enabling for their peace of mind...

Connected to this, the role of Project eARTh in helping people to establish a routine and giving them something to look forward to in the week was also highlighted by volunteers:

...for them to see the same people each week. So it's a bit of routine...

I think that must be so nice to feel that regularity in your life. And you think okay, 'Well, I'll have to look forward to this'.

Volunteers also commented on the sense of pride participants appeared to derive from their finished artworks. This was often particularly evident at the celebration days:

...being proud of what they've done. The fact that...they're community projects that then go to places that you can see...

I think the celebration day's absolutely gorgeous, when the things get presented to somebody. So when the mayor came, that was such a big deal to the group, you know, they'd all dressed up, and it went really well...it was so lovely seeing when the presentations, and it's a big deal...And the participants were just so delighted with the public fanfare of it, I think that's an important date because it could easily be like, 'Well, that's just a waste of a day', but actually, it's really important because the purpose for them is to give...So if you're making something with a purpose, you need to be able to give it to it in order to complete the cycle...

...everybody was pleased to see the final result of something that they'd contributed to, and they were quite proud of what they'd achieved and what they've created. And the final piece...was really well put together by the artist and finished off professionally and everything.

Volunteers themselves benefitted from a sense of belonging from being part of Project eARTh and helping to make a positive difference to people's lives:

There's definitely that feelgood factor that you're a part of something that's a very positive thing in people's lives... it's really rewarding that you're a part of making that happen for people.

...at the end of every session, I just feel so uplifted, that I'm doing something that I can see is having a positive effect on people...

I made a suggestion about something [a participant] could do at home, and she did it and she brought it in the next week...and she was saying, 'This really does help me and I love that you are really interested in what I'm doing'. And I think that made me feel good, because she felt good...

More broadly, volunteers commented on the ways in which Project eARTh had helped them to feel more connected to their local community:

...it was allowing me to kind of engage in the community a bit more.

For one volunteer, being involved in Project eARTh had helped her to broaden her knowledge around various learning and social needs and support available for individuals:

...it broadened my understanding of different adult needs, and also what things were in place by local authorities and things and how that sort of works. So I've had an insight into something different.

All the volunteers interviewed were vehement in their views that Project eARTh needed to continue:

Lifeline sounds a bit dramatic. But you know, people have said that it's like a lifeline for them. Being in a community and being in the social group concerned for each other...I think that sense of community for quite a few people is the main thing in their life...it's a real quality element to a lot of people's lives, and it picks them up. And when people are not feeling so good, they still can come along and be and it's okay. And that's a big difference, isn't it rather than just stay locked away? So definitely, to continue, would be so fantastic.

My main thing is, 'Oh, my God, I hope it continues'. I know there's funding issues. I'd love it to be two sessions. But the biggest thing is letting it continue.

Challenges faced

Volunteers reflected on the merging of the two groups in each town back into a single group in September 2022 following the end of Covid-19 restrictions. They noted that some participants who had been in the afternoon group found an earlier start tricky. One also commented that the fact there was no lunch break between groups meant there were fewer opportunities for volunteers and artists to chat and reflect on how the session had gone. Some volunteers also commented on the increased size of the groups (as a result of returning to a single group and also increasing demand), but also an increased diversity of needs (particularly in the Buxton group). This meant that the types

of support people required to allow them to take part in the activities could be very different, which was challenging for volunteers as well as artists.

Whilst longer-term volunteers were happy with the support for volunteers, those who had joined the project more recently suggested possible improvements to the recruitment and induction process for volunteers:

I think if somebody hadn't come from a care background that might be more challenging for a volunteer....I think because of my experience...it was like, 'You're fine; you know what you're doing'. And that may be something that would be considered for volunteers coming in from, like the private sector or business sector that might not know [how to support people effectively].

...I think what I needed more was to be...in a room with other people being creative together. Rather than you know, it was more like a teaching assistant sort of role. And so that wasn't really what I needed or particularly wanted...I think, maybe I think that needs to be clarified...so the expectations when you do sign up to be a volunteer are clear as to what it is you'll be doing.

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 spaces and the aims of their organisations:

Artwork is lovely and is a good fit for our organisation. Our events are relaxed, colourful picnics where cakes feature a lot....suits the images on the flags! The flags...will appear as part of the Buxton Pride Picnic presence at Buxton Fringe Festival. (Buxton Pride)

The banner is a great fit, members of the committee commented on how vibrant it is and the perfect orange colour for our brand. It was also mentioned how the images cover all the sections of the fringe... I think the large size is really useful for us and it will really make an impact. The bunting and beautiful lanterns will also be useful as decoration for our events...It was really lovely to have a presentation event too to meet some of the participants and celebrate their efforts. (Buxton Fringe)

Visually a great fit and especially suitable as they were created by a community organisation that strives to be inclusive and participatory...We had lots of feedback about how they added

to the feel of the event and also about the content chosen which fitted with our themes. (One World Festival, New Mills)

The flags fit very well with the values and aims of the One World Festival. The delicacy of the silk conveys peacefulness and harmony. The decoration also represents our themes of peace, care of the environment and unity. This is further conveyed by the teamwork involved in making the flags...The flags are colourful and convey joy and positivity. (One World Festival, New Mills)

The artwork was wonderful and the colours especially fit our organisation! We distributed the artwork to some of the people that we befriended. We thought that this was the best way to use them as they will be admired and treasured by the person who has received them knowing all the work that has gone into them. The people who received a cushion were all truly delighted with it; it was a good fit to befriending as our older people are sometimes lonely and isolated. The giving of this artwork meant someone went to visit the older person in their home to pass it on; this was very much appreciated. They also knew that someone had spent the time making it for them, which to some meant a lot. (Connex Community Support Befriending Service)

It's brilliant. It's absolutely perfect...it is really centre stage just close to the cinema and the café...So it's in there and it's really natural. We're an organic garden...so it's a seed swap and right now it's turned into a seedling swap and we put our leaflets and other things there as well. It's a community structure: if people have extra seeds, they leave them and they take our seeds that we harvest and packet up...So it's been it's been great having it there. (Serpentine Community Garden)

The banners fit Rock Mill Centre really well...It is a lovely addition to our other maps and it's an eyecatcher...Many of our events are linked to local nature, particularly a project we are developing with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. The larger hanging presents this aspect of what we are about beautifully. (Rock Mill Centre, New Mills)

Furthermore, organisations reported that the artworks had received positive comments from their own staff, as well as clients/users or the general public:

Beautiful - a lovely, generous thing for Project eARTh to have done; we appreciate this support a lot and hope some of their members will join us at our main event. (Buxton Pride)

...committee members and friends and family who have seen it are delighted by it. "It covers everything we do" said one committee member. "Wow! It's really vibrant!" said another! (Buxton Fringe)

We think that the artwork is very clever and the effect is beautiful. It is wonderful how you have used items from nature and used their natural beauty to create fabulous pieces of art. We have had lots of positive comments and feedback all saying similar things such as how lovely they are, beautiful, very clever...Thank you for sharing your artwork with us we enjoyed it very much. (Connex Community Support Befriending Service)

We couldn't have been more pleased with them. They definitely added an element that we have aspired to in the past but not managed to raise the funds for! (One World Festival, New Mills)

I think they are striking pieces that work really well for us as conversation starters and attractive pieces. (Rock Mill Centre, New Mills)

We love the structure, that's really the nicest gift ever. We love it...anybody that goes through the art centre loves seeing it...We have a lot of tourists in Buxton...They've said it's beautiful, it's natural, it's attractive and it's engaging...they feel free to engage with it. (Serpentine Community Garden, Buxton)

Lots of people who walk past our office look at the books. The feedback's been positive; people say how nice they look. (Sett Valley Insurance, New Mills)

A festival goer was so impressed by the flags that she was prepared to pay a fee to have them on display at her wedding. She thought they were beautiful and appropriate for her celebration. (One World Festival, New Mills)

Pupils at New Mills Primary School wrote thank you notes to the group for the cards they received. Here are a selection of their comments.

Dear High Peak Community

Thank you for ~~all~~ the cards,

I sent back this one because I like the
black and white effect and the clever shading

but they were all fabulous 😊

Thanks again

Dear high peak community arts

Thank you so much for all these cards they are
very ~~detailed~~ detailed and nice especially the
wave season ~~card~~ card. I love the ones with
green on them.

Dear, High peak community arts
thank you for this wonderful
gift. I particularly like this
one as I really like the colours
on the leaves and how you
made them look so realistic.
I also really like the shell
and the shadow.
These are really inspirational
and beautiful

Dear high peak community arts.

Thank you for all the beautiful, wonderful
cards that we can use to write birthday cards.
I really like the purple and the glowers
and all the bright colours it has
on.

Thank you!!

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

Many participants have established friendships through Project eARTh, and these often extend beyond the sessions themselves. At the end of this evaluation period, in summer 2023, 65% of participants who completed survey had a higher 'score' for 'making connections' than they had done in their baseline survey. There was 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'; and 'feel part of the local community'.

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 their spaces, as well as fitting with the aims of their organisation in terms of themes or approaches taken. They also 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.

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

For many participants, Project eARTh is one of very few social activities they take part in. Many describe how, without Project eARTh, they would feel extremely isolated. Comparing baseline survey scores to those in summer 2023, 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 photography or sound art. In addition to artistic skills, participants developed skills in teamworking, patience and co-operation, as well as gaining increased confidence in both artistic and social skills.

The act of working as a collective to create a work of art is one of the most important aspects of Project eARTh and differentiates it from many other arts for wellbeing groups. 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.

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

Participants describe how Project eARTh supports their psychological wellbeing by providing distraction, relaxation, companionship and motivation. Amongst those who completed surveys, 61% had a higher 'wellbeing' score in summer 2023 than they had done in their baseline survey. In addition, case studies demonstrate how Project eARTh can have a lasting impact on participants' wellbeing, for example, leading to them to undertake voluntary work or move into paid employment.

Participants reported feeling better after a Project eARTh workshop on 96% (New Mills) and 89% (Buxton) of occasions. For both groups, the average increase in their ratings (out of 10) before and after a session was statistically significant. Only 6% of participants used negative words to describe how they felt at the end of sessions, compared to 39% who did so at the start.

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

Project eARTh helps to provide participants with a support network to share concerns with. 35% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in summer 2023 than they had done in their baseline survey and there was a statistically significant improvement in participants saying they 'have been feeling motivated'.

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.

Working with larger and more diverse groups

Larger groups with diverse needs can be challenging for project artists, support staff and volunteers as well as being too noisy for some participants. One of the strengths of Project eARTh is that people can continue to attend rather than having to leave after a set period, but this means numbers are increasing.

- There is clear evidence of demand so **if funding becomes available, smaller groups and/or more specialist groups might be considered.**
- In a larger group, the role of volunteers becomes more important, so more **guidance/examples for artists on how they might work with volunteers may be helpful.**
- As groups get more diverse, **training for volunteers might need to be reviewed.**
- In groups with more participants with complex and differing needs **it may be necessary to cost in more prep time for artists.**
- For artists with less experience working with HPCA (or similar organisations), in addition to the conversations held at the end of each workshop, it may be worth **scheduling an interim meeting to reflect on sessions to date and reiterate the types of support that are available** (e.g. support with planning, providing additional activities for participants who finish quickly) as some artists did not appear to be aware that this type of support was available.

Resolving tension between process-based and product-based approaches

Several artists were explicit that their practice was process-based, but participants may not initially have understood what this meant or expected more emphasis on the end product and skills development.

- It may be helpful to **discuss this issue more explicitly as part of the selection process.**
- Actively encourage **artists to use the selection interview experience (or visit the group) to find out more about the groups' skills, needs and expectations.**
- **Artists with limited experience producing an end product with a group may need additional support** (e.g. talking to another artist with more experience of this process).

Making evaluation more sustainable

The evaluation process helps to demonstrate the impact of Project eARTh as well as highlighting issues or problems experienced by either individuals or larger groups of participants. However, collecting and recording evaluation data can be time-consuming.

- To reduce the burden of data collection, it may be appropriate to **move to a yearly (rather than 6-monthly) follow up survey for established participants and sampling weekly sessions** from which to collect session feedback.