



Project eARTh evaluation

2023-24

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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 14 years. The project runs two weekly groups, one in New Mills and another in Buxton.

During the 2023-24 project year, there were 31 participants (4 men, 27 women) who stayed for longer than one session in New Mills, whilst in Buxton, there were 30 participants (11 men, 19 women) who attended more than one session. Therefore, in total, there were 61 participants (15 men, 46 women). In each group there were also three carers (all female) who accompanied participants and joined in the projects.

Projects June 23 – June 24

Projects carried out within the year June 2023 to June 2024 were: Townend mosaics; the Cranky; printing and zines: Route 61 Poetry book: paper mâché animals; ceramic planters: Sounds that Soothe: felted landscapes and felted animals; Doves of Peace; and River Corridor. These are described below by the project co-ordinator, Alison Bowry.

All available artwork (not already permanently installed in a community venue) will form part of our 'It's in Our Nature' Showcase on 29th September at Spring Bank Arts Centre. Artwork will also feature in the journal we are creating for all participants, 'It's in our Nature', a Journal for Any Year'.

Townend Mosaics

The Buxton group continued 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. Workshops continued into July 2023 to complete the mosaics, and they were unveiled in September by the Deputy Mayor of the High Peak at a Celebratory Tea Party at the Community Garden.





Sounds that Soothe

In June and July 2023, the New Mills group continued working with artist Ian Pringle to create soundscapes of relaxing sounds – e.g. woodland walk and seascapes and the resulting soundscapes are on the [HPCA website](https://www.hpcanetwork.org.uk/).



The Cranky

From September to November 2023, the Buxton group worked with artist Lois Blackburn to create a 'Cranky'. This is a wooden structure, like an open TV, through which you 'crank' scrolls, so the images on it pass across the 'screen'. The group made two scrolls illustrating local landscapes, landmarks and wildlife, as well as changing seasons. We held an unveiling event in late November, and then the Cranky was displayed in the Green Man Gallery in Buxton over Christmas and until the end of March 2024.



Felted Animal and Landscapes

In autumn 2023, and then into January 2024, The New Mills group worked with artist Carol Wilson to make felted animals (owls, foxes and badgers) and some landscapes (building on work done in intergenerational holiday workshops). The landscapes will be made into wall hangings for St. Matthews Church Hall in Hayfield after the Showcase Event in September 2024.



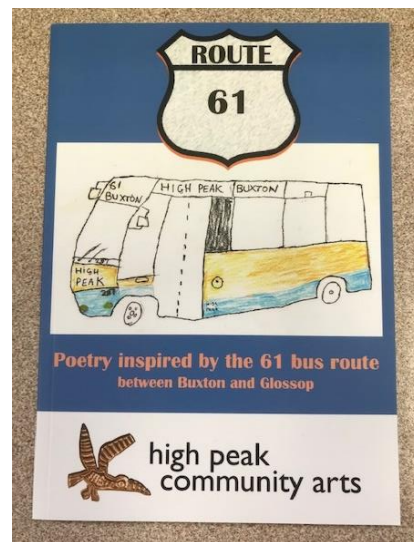
Printing and Zines

The Buxton group worked with artists Mandy and Charlie Collins on a 2-week project to do a variety of printing methods, and then makes mini zines from the prints.



Route 61 Creative Writing Project

Both groups worked with poet Genevieve Carver (New Mills in autumn 2023 and Buxton in January/February 2024) on creative writing to create a book inspired by the 61 Bus Route between Buxton and Glossop - looking at the places on the route, the nature, the landscape, the towns, villages, history, and other themes, memories and experiences that participants felt inspired to write about. The book was launched on March 28th 2024 and 20 of the poems are now displayed as A4 posters on High Peak Buses.



'Doves of Peace' Textile Printing Project

In February and March 2024, the New Mills group worked with artist Joanna Allen to create 3D doves from collograh printing onto calico. The resulting flock of 26 doves was installed in St. George's Church on 26th June for a Celebratory Event on 27th, and displayed over the summer.



Papier Mâché Animals

In March and April 2024, the Buxton group worked with artist Patty Callaghan to make papier mâché animals of their choice. People mainly chose their favourite pets, so we had dog, cats, guinea pigs and hamsters, but also a tiger, fox, hedgehog and a sheep.



River Corridor Project

In April and May 2024, the New Mills group worked with artist Liz Wewiora, exploring the New Mills river corridors of the Goyt and Sett, through collage, gel printing, lumen printing, oral interviews and written word – which Liz is making into a film to be shown on July 18th at Bank Arts, and which will then be available to view at the Rock Mill Centre in New Mills.



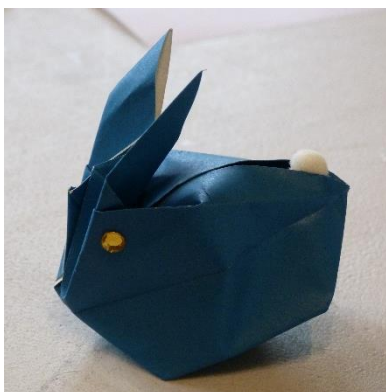
Ceramic Planters

From April to early June 2024, the Buxton group worked with artist Sue Blatherwick to make ceramic planters, and in the final week, planted succulents in them to take home.



Origami

To finish the term in June 2024, the New Mills group had a one-off workshop on origami, with artist Nia Williams, learning to make rabbits and cranes.



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 in sessions, or by the mental health support worker or other Project eARTh staff. Participants also have the option to self-complete the surveys online. There is also an exit survey 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. Evaluation sessions

In June 2024, evaluation sessions were held at New Mills and Buxton. During these sessions, participants were supported in completing their end of year participant surveys and had an opportunity to share their experiences with each other. The evaluator also engaged in informal conversations with participants to gather more detailed information about the impacts of Project eARTh.

d. Observation of celebration events

The evaluator attended a joint celebration event for both groups in spring 2024. This involved observing the activities and talking to participants and visitors.

e. Feedback from artists

Following each commission, artists are asked to provide written feedback on the sessions. In addition, two artists were interviewed by the evaluator.

f. Interviews with volunteers and support workers

Three Project eARTh volunteers and one project support worker were interviewed to explore their views on the project. These interviews were conducted online or by phone.

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 2023-24 project year in relation to participants' baselines. In addition, participants' baseline responses are compared to those after they had been coming to Project eARTh for 6, 12, 18 and 24 months. Finally, there is an analysis of the most recent follow up surveys available for each participant compared to their baseline.

Quantitative data

2023-24 project year compared to baseline

In total, 32 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up survey during the 2023-24 project year. Of these, 17 were from New Mills and 15 from the Buxton group. The time between participants' baseline and final survey ranged between 6 months and 44 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 surveys¹:

- I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones* (p<0.01)
- I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people* (p<0.05)
- I've been taking part in other activities* (p<0.01)
- I feel part of the local community* (p<0.01)
- I've been feeling confident* (p<0.01)
- I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good* (p<0.01)
- I feel like I've been coping well with problems
- I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing* (p<0.01)
- I've been feeling anxious or depressed* (p<0.05)
- I have been feeling motivated* (p<0.01)
- I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful

¹ * indicates the improvement was statistically significant.

- I have been feeling relaxed* ($p < 0.01$).

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

Statement	Follow up rating lower than baseline	Follow up rating higher than baseline	Follow up rating same as baseline	Mean difference
I've got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones	3	21	8	1.19*
I've been spending time or keeping in touch with other people	7	15	10	0.5*
I've been taking part in other activities	4	22	6	1.03*
I feel part of the local community	5	20	7	1.0*
I've been feeling confident	5	15	12	0.59*
I've been feeling good about myself, and my self-esteem is good	4	13	15	0.53*
I feel like I've been coping well with problems	7	14	11	0.34
I've needed the support of my doctor or other professionals**	13	11	8	-0.06
I feel being creative improves my sense of wellbeing	4	18	10	0.66*
I have been feeling anxious or depressed**	6	12	14	0.44*
I have been feeling motivated	8	18	6	0.47*
I have been feeling generally happy or cheerful	8	13	11	0.34
I have been feeling relaxed	4	15	13	0.59*

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):

- 84% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the 2023-24 follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 53% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 2023-24 follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 69% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the 2023-24 follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

The following section draws together findings from follow up surveys completed since 2020 to explore the impact of Project eARTh after attending for 6, 12, 18 and 24 months. 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 important to note that circumstances changed considerably as restriction gradually eased before being removed completely. When interpreting these findings, it is therefore worth bearing in mind that participants' responses may well have been influenced by external factors over the last four 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, 38 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 6 months later. Of these, 24 were from New Mills and 14 from the Buxton group. When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing':

- 45% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the 6-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 42% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 6-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 61% 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, 37 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 12 months later. Of these, 19 were from New Mills and 18 from the Buxton group. When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing':

- 76% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the 12-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 57% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 12-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 54% 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, 24 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 18 months later. Of these, 12 were from New Mills and 12 from the Buxton group. When responses to individual questions were combined to create measures for 'making connections'; 'confidence and resilience'; and 'wellbeing':

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- 54% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the 18-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
 - 58% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 18-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
 - 71% 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, 25 participants completed both a baseline survey and a follow up approximately 24 months later. Of these, 15 were from New Mills and 10 from the Buxton group. 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
- 48% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the 24-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 56% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the 24-month follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

Most recent follow up survey compared to baseline

In total, 61 participants completed a baseline and at least one follow up survey, 38 from New Mills and 23 from Buxton. For participants who have completed multiple follow up surveys, only their most recent response was included. Follow up surveys included in this analysis were completed when participants had been attending Project eARTh for between 2 months and 44 months. Furthermore, baseline surveys were completed between June 2020 and January 2024, and follow up surveys between February 2021 and June 2024. They therefore include a variety of experiences, including involvement during and after Covid restrictions.

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

- 75% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in their most recent follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 52% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in their most recent follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 69% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in their most recent follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

Qualitative data

Comments provided on the baseline and follow up surveys, as well as informal interviews with participants during 2023-24, 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 few participants, Project eARTh is the only social activity they take part in and is critical to reducing their sense of isolation.

I'm long term sick. I don't normally go out. I live by myself and I don't have friends in the area, but I come here once a week. I like it because I meet people and make myself busy. It's the only time I go out except for when I go shopping.

However, the majority of participants are now taking part in other activities. In a number of cases, they were introduced to these additional activities through Project eARTh, or by individuals they had met at the group.

I've just started going to one other group for Pilates and a knitting group...One of my friends from here encouraged me to go to the knitting group with her.

I have much more confidence to talk to people which has enabled me to join in groups, especially craft and art which I would never have done before joining HPCA.

I've made new friends and I've also started going to other groups. For instance, I've been going to a pottery group in Whaley Bridge for three months now. It can help with loneliness.

I have gained a lot of confidence through coming to the community arts group. I now meet up regularly with people on my estate for walks and to socialise, plus I now go to bingo on a Wednesday night at our local club.

Some participants reflected on the fact that they can find it challenging to develop friendships or support networks, but attending Project eARTh had helped them to establish constructive relationships.

The group is the family that I've chosen. They've encouraged this introvert person to join extra activities rather than hide in the safety of my own home.

Working in groups has given me a whole new world of friends, helping me to communicate better.

Several commented on the way in which Project eARTh participants have become friends and often support each other, emotionally and practically, both within and outside the sessions.

I made some good friends through the group and we regularly message each other or meet up outside of High Peak Arts. We have encouraged each other to do craft fairs and have been a massive support to each other in difficult times.

We support each other, especially during lockdown when we'd ring round and do shopping for others. We've visited each other when people have been in hospital. We share knowledge to help each other.

Coming to the art project has helped me to meet new people and make new friends which has made me very happy and I feel that I have found a place where I can be myself and have fun while doing this. I did know a few people before starting art, but since starting, I feel I've made a lot of new friends for life thanks to the art project.

We have formed a very close group that meet once a month for social or creative activities and collectively attend workshops. I've definitely become more active within the wider community.

In addition to providing opportunities to form new friendships, Project eARTh can also help to strengthen existing relationships. There are several family groups (couples, or parents and children) who attend sessions together and a number commented on the positive impact of Project eARTh on their relationships.

I come to the group with my daughter. I feel it is really helpful for her and me in getting out together and socialising at the group.

In art group I feel most normal and like myself. I feel relaxed and happy. I also love being with my mum too!

The art class is something we do together as a couple.

In a similar vein, participants who were part of a volunteer befriending scheme were able to further develop their relationship at Project eARTh.

As a volunteer befriender: Project eARTh gives me a great opportunity to spent time with my client in an atmosphere which he is happy with.

There is a clear sense of pride in the artwork produced at Project eARTh. It is especially important to participants that the artwork created is donated to community organisations, thereby allowing them to make a contribution to the wider community.

It's good to keep some [art] things, but also to do things for the community as well as yourself that can boost everyone else's happiness.

You get pride through doing the art, but it's nice that it's something long lasting: it's not just about you; it's about the community.

I really enjoy the artwork; I like that it goes outside. That makes me feel more connected to the community.

Confidence and resilience

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

I feel proud of myself from doing something creative. I don't feel pointless; I feel as though I've got somewhere to go. I feel more confident.

I'm quite a lonely person, but coming to the group has helped me to gain confidence and motivated me. I feel more part of the community.

Some shared concrete examples of the ways in which Project eARTh has impacted on their confidence and self-esteem.

Being back at group has given me the confidence to go back to doing craft fairs with the help of [other participants].

The confidence Project eARTh has given me personally and creatively has helped me to present myself publicly as an artist. I have had a market stall and work for sale in local pubs and shops. Most recently I created a mural for a pub patio garden. My experience of Project eARTh has given me the courage to pursue my ambition to be a self-employed artist with job centre Restart, which is ongoing.

Others felt that the group had improved their ability to cope with problems they faced. For a number, this helped to give them greater independence as they were less reliant on professional support.

I feel like I can cope better with day-to-day activities and if something happens unexpectedly, I have the confidence to manage difficult situations. The level of support I need from professionals is much less.

We have a difficult family situation at the moment, which is causing the anxiety and depression. But crafting in any form keeps me motivated. Coming to group helps me deal with what's going on as the social side is a good distraction and also, it's more creative time!

Although I suffer from long term anxiety and social phobia, Project eARTh is a lifeline to me and without art I would end up in hospital...it is the only thing that alleviates my symptoms of anxiety. Without it, I would be completely isolated and unable to cope with the most mundane problems.

A participant who was a full-time carer described how the group provided a period of respite:

The group is my time from being a full-time carer. It is a big help as a release from dealing with the problems. Gives you confidence in solving problems. Belief in yourself. Boosts self esteem.

Wellbeing

Many participants commented on ways that Project eARTh contributes to their wellbeing by helping to reduce anxiety and isolation, and supporting a more positive outlook.

I struggle with mental health problems and don't feel stressed or anxious when I'm at the art group.

Being creative makes me happy and is good for my wellbeing, keeps me busy and helps positivity.

Anxiety and depression caused by specific medical problems. Having groups gives me a reason to get out of bed...

...mixing with others in the group helps a lot; you don't feel alone.

A frequent comment was that attending Project eARTh helps participants to feel more relaxed. This could be especially true for those who tended to feel anxious in social situations.

I become anxious around people, especially when I have to interact with them. With art projects I can focus on the art and not people so this allows me to join in to a limited extent. The art helps me to stop focusing on issues that cause rising levels of anxiety and helps me to relax.

I sometimes get anxious when meeting new people or doing new things, but since we have been coming to art it has helped me to feel relaxed and helped me to remember that new things can be fun and helpful.

I am able to relax. I am less anxious when I am here.

For others, taking part in Project eARTh provides a distraction from external concerns and enables them to focus on more positive activities.

I have been able to concentrate and focus on creative activities and crafts really well and that makes me feel so much happier. My head is busy but I've been able to motivate myself to work on projects and goals that I haven't been able to do for a long time, over 10 years.

I never feel good about myself, but when I come to the group I can have a couple of hours to forget everything going on.

I find it a great distraction. It takes my mind off my own mental health problems...

As well as helping participants to cope better with long-term problems, Project eARTh often provides support at a time of crisis and helps participants to move forward in a positive way.

Before I came to Project eARTh, I was suicidal and I used to stay in bed all day. [Now] I look forward to this group each week and I have a small group I like sitting with and also chatting to other people who come. I feel much more confident going to other groups now because this was the only one I came to where I felt safe.

I'd lost my job and I didn't feel part of the wider world anymore. [Through Project eARTh] I got more connected to the community and it reduced isolation.

I gained the confidence to speak about my feelings and through that I knew that I wasn't looking after myself and I needed help. This meant I was then given a referral for the counselling that I needed.

With the support of my partner, GP and friends, I've been dealing with some very difficult issues recently and coming to group has boosted me no end. My friends here have lifted me no end and I'll be forever grateful.

If I hadn't come here, I might not be here. My family are so glad I come to High Peak Arts when I was giving up on life and did not leave the house.

Just recently discharged from hospital and still under the crisis team and feel like this group is really helping me and my recovery.

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 2023-24 sessions as a word cloud. The most frequently mentioned words were good, tired and anxious. Overall, 46% of participants used negative words to describe their feelings at the start of the session; 27% used neutral words (e.g. ok); and 26% used positive words (perhaps in anticipation of the session in some cases, e.g. ‘excited’).



Fig 1: Word cloud of 'before' words

Figure 2 represents participants' 'after' responses as a word cloud. The most frequently mentioned words were 'good', 'happy' and 'better'. Overall, 90% of participants used positive words to describe their feelings; 6% used neutral or indeterminate words; and just 4% used negative words.



Fig 2: Word cloud of 'after' words

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 93% of occasions. The average difference in their ratings (out of 10) before and after a session was 3.0 (a statistically significant difference, $p < 0.01$). The average difference ranged from 2.1 to 4.0.

For all sessions, there was evidence of a statistically significant difference between 'before' and 'after' scores (participants felt better after). In 69% 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?
15 th June 2023	10	90%	2.9	Yes (p<0.01)
22 nd June 2023	4	100%	3.3	Yes (p<0.05)
29 th June 2023	3	100%	4.0	Yes (p<0.05)
6 th July 2023	6	100%	3.2	Yes (p<0.01)
13 th July 2023	4	100%	2.5	Yes (p<0.05)
20 th July 2023	6	100%	2.8	Yes (p<0.01)
5 th Oct 2023	21	100%	3.5	Yes (p<0.01)
12 th Oct 2023	18	100%	3.4	Yes (p<0.01)
19 th Oct 2023	15	80%	2.1	Yes (p<0.01)
9 th Nov 2023	9	100%	2.4	Yes (p<0.01)
16 th Nov 2023	12	92%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
23 rd Nov 2023	19	100%	3.1	Yes (p<0.01)
30 th Nov 2023	16	100%	2.9	Yes (p<0.01)
7 th Dec 2023	9	100%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
18 th Jan 2024	17	100%	2.8	Yes (p<0.01)
25 th Jan 2024	10	90%	3.0	Yes (p<0.01)
1 st Feb 2024	15	87%	2.1	Yes (p<0.01)
15 th Feb 2024	9	100%	3.7	Yes (p<0.01)
7 th Mar 2024	11	91%	2.7	Yes (p<0.01)
14 th Mar 2024	11	100%	3.5	Yes (p<0.01)
21 st Mar 2024	19	95%	2.8	Yes (p<0.01)
18 th Apr 2024	13	100%	3.1	Yes (p<0.01)
25 th Apr 2024	11	100%	3.2	Yes (p<0.01)
2 nd May 2024	13	100%	3.6	Yes (p<0.01)
9 th May 2024	12	100%	3.4	Yes (p<0.01)
16 th May 2024	12	92%	3.4	Yes (p<0.01)
All sessions	305	93%	3.0	Yes (p<0.01)

Table 2: New Mills session feedback

Buxton

Overall, Buxton participants reported feeling better after the Project eARTh activity on 91% 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 1.3 to 3.0.

For all sessions except two, there was evidence of a statistically significant difference between 'before' and 'after' scores (participants felt better after). In 20% 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 ²	Average difference (after-before scores)	Statistically significant difference in before/after scores?
5 th June 2023	14	85%	2.0	Yes (p<0.01)
12 th June 2023	12	75%	1.8	Yes (p<0.01)
19 th June 2023	11	82%	1.7	Yes (p<0.01)
26 th June 2023	8	88%	1.8	Yes (p<0.01)
7 th July 2023	11	73%	1.5	Yes (p<0.01)
10 th July 2023	12	83%	2.4	Yes (p<0.01)
18 th Sept 2023	15	93%	2.6	Yes (p<0.01)
25 th Sept 2023	14	86%	2.7	Yes (p<0.01)
2 nd Oct 2023	12	83%	2.0	Yes (p<0.05)
9 th Oct 2023	12	75%	1.3	Yes (p<0.05)
16 th Oct 2023	12	83%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
6 th Nov 2023	13	92%	1.9	No
13 th Nov 2023	6	83%	2.0	No
20 th Nov 2023	10	80%	2.0	Yes (p<0.01)
14 th Dec 2023	9	100%	3.0	Yes (p<0.01)
8 th Jan 2024	12	91%	1.9	Yes (p<0.01)
15 th Jan 2024	10	100%	1.8	Yes (p<0.01)
22 nd Jan 2024	12	67%	1.7	Yes (p<0.01)
29 th Jan 2024	9	83%	1.3	Yes (p<0.05)
5 th Feb 2024	5	100%	1.8	Yes (p<0.05)
12 th Feb 2024	14	85%	2.0	Yes (p<0.01)
4 th March 2024	8	100%	2.6	Yes (p<0.01)
11 th March 2024	13	100%	2.5	Yes (p<0.01)
18 th March 2024	13	85%	2.2	Yes (p<0.01)
25 th March 2024	9	100%	2.7	Yes (p<0.01)
15 th April 2024	10	80%	2.4	Yes (p<0.01)
22 nd April 2024	16	86%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
29 th April 2024	15	92%	2.3	Yes (p<0.01)
13 th May 2024	12	82%	1.6	Yes (p<0.01)
20 th May 2024	12	89%	1.9	Yes (p<0.01)
All sessions	341	91%	2.1	Yes (p<0.01)

Table 3: Buxton session feedback

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

The workshop feedback form also asks participants to comment on what they liked, disliked and learnt during each session.

Many participants said they **liked** everything about Project eARTh. For those who were more specific, art and social interaction were the most common themes. Many participants liked experimenting and learning about different arts techniques, for example:

experimenting with different colours

learning to use the computer to search for sounds

using lots of different paints

experimenting with brushes

learning different techniques with paint pastels etc.

Others commented on the social elements of the session:

meeting friendly people

relaxing with my friends

spending time with people

the group - gossip/ chatting to others

being here & having a chat with people

meeting up with the group again and sharing.

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

lovely morning mood lifting day

the friendly, casual atmosphere

chilled out session.

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

seeing all the print work finished

how my cauliflower turned out once it was finished

how the lettering turned out on the mosaic.

When asked what they had **disliked**, some participants commented on personal difficulties they were facing that were not necessarily related to the session itself:

brain not working properly

couldn't do words today

I'm in a bad mood today.

Others mentioned difficulty executing a particular skill as well as they wanted to:

that when I cut the tiles they didn't come out the shape I wanted
the chalk kept smudging.

In addition, several participants commented that they did not like messy activities or art techniques where they might get dirty. Others mentioned factors related to events outside the session itself, such as 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:

blending colours
how to better use the watercolours
how to cut the tiles into shape
how to draw animals
how to make a zine
how to work with clay
how to edit sounds
texture techniques for making a collagraph plate.

Several also learnt more about social connections and working with others:

that social connection is important
to be able to ask for help
mixing with others.

Others reflected on what they had learnt about nature or the local environment:

about the countryside
about the turbine at New Mills by writing a poem.

Artist views

Artist feedback was gathered via feedback forms and interviews. In total, seven Project eARTh artists contributed to the evaluation. Artists reflected on the benefits of the activities for participants which they had observed. These included relaxation, pride, distraction, absorption and a sense of achievement.

Several people commented on how relaxing they found the repetitive nature of the process.

For many of the group, their time in the sessions was a distraction from ill health, mental or/and physical, a chance to be absorbed in an activity that gently stretched, brought joy, or simply distracted.

When I took photographs of the finished work, some people seemed genuinely pleased (and surprised!) at what they had achieved.

The group shared a sense of pride at the finished artwork, and delight that it would be shared with a wider public in the exhibition.

... you could see that, at the beginning, a lot of people said, 'Oh, I can't do it'. And then by the end, they really were doing it!

Artists commented on the high quality of the artwork produced, including the way in which individual inputs were brought together as a cohesive piece.

I was very pleased with the end product, it worked beautifully as an artwork, and brought a wide range of different styles and talents into one cohesive piece of art.

I loved the work that was produced – I felt quite jealous about how good one or two of the pieces were! They had so much character and life – it felt as though the people taking part 'got it'.

I'm really pleased with it...when you see it all in print, and it's been done...It was printed like a proper book, and I think it's really important having something like that. HPCA are really good at that; they create outputs that really look sort of professional and stand the test of time, rather than just, 'Here's a load of paper that we've stapled together'...

One of the challenges for artists was the size of the groups. Project eARTh groups are larger than many were used to working with and meant that it could be “difficult investigate in much depth people’s own interests, ideas and skills”. One artist described how the size of the groups had led her to experiment with new ways of working.

...normally, if I'm running a workshop...you can all sit down together and discuss everything...But there's nearly 30 of them so you're kind of stood up like a teacher and we're on different tables...I learnt a lot about group work...a lot of people weren't confident about writing on their own, but they really enjoyed working on a poem together, and that became a really important tool, a really important method.

Given the size of the groups, volunteers and support workers had an important role to play in supporting the artistic activities.

I'd initially been apprehensive since the group is larger than I'd worked with previously, but that wasn't a problem, largely because of the volunteers and PAs. The project volunteers especially were very good at taking on my whole class input and then using that to give one-to-one support to those who needed it. If they needed further help from me, they would ask, and this proved an effective unspoken system.

However, an artist who worked with both groups perceived a difference in the types of support available in the Buxton and New Mills groups.

At Buxton, there were volunteers and support workers working with each table, which worked really well, but in New Mills it was a bit of a challenge having to get round all the groups. So if I could improve something it would be to have support staff available at New Mills as they were at Buxton to work at each table...In New Mills, the volunteers are more taken up with the kitchen and stuff like that...and I noticed that difference.

Overall, however, artists were highly appreciative of the support offered throughout their commission by volunteers and staff:

The support workers and volunteers were wonderful; the project wouldn't have happened without them. They were knowledgeable, thoughtful, considerate and always helpful.

I've worked with many voluntary and community organisations over time and High Peak Community Arts have definitely been amongst the best in terms of effective communication and organisation.

Volunteer and support staff views

Volunteers and support staff also noted benefits to participants of taking part in Project eARTh. One of the key benefits mentioned was the opportunity for social interaction within a safe, supportive space.

I think [the benefits include] a sense of belonging, and certainly a sense of community, and they feel that it's a safe space.

[Benefits for participants include] the social interaction, making friends, being part of the community, and being out in the world...

...some are just lonely; they just want to chat...I think it's more important for them to talk...

I'm loving how new people have been embraced by the group...I love seeing how people are interacting and supporting each other...It's a fantastic group.... I see them supporting each other...It's wonderful. I really love being part of it.

[Through coming to Project eARTh] they've got people who feel like friends that they can see when they go there, but without the pressure of all the expectations of what a commitment to a friendship entails...they feel like they've got a friend once a week. So that's been very, very special, and they've said they don't feel like that at other places.

Another benefit noted by volunteers and support staff was a sense of pride in creating something and, in particular, the fact that artworks created are given to the local community.

...there's all that pride and all those things that you would normally get from creating something, which is why anybody, I think, creates...you do it first and foremost for yourself, don't you, and then to be part of a group of people doing that just reinforces confidence...

And some are so proud of what they do at the end...it's a really nice community feel.

The fact that Project Earth makes things for the community, I think, gives people a sense of being part of the community as well, and that they enjoy seeing things out in the community. And they've taken people that they know to go and see them and say, "I've contributed to that"... So the very fact that they feel like they're contributing to making somebody else happy is great.

Whilst other projects or organisations may offer opportunities for arts engagement and/or social interaction, volunteers and support workers commented that Project eARTh was unique amongst support available locally in a number of ways. A support worker reflected on the way in which, at Project eARTh, participants are encouraged to engage in ways that suit them, rather than feeling compelled to complete a set task or activity.

[One of the participants] liked to do things his own way. So he liked to be shown a technique, but not necessarily be told, "You should do one of these"...he would spend quite a long time immersed in just one part of creating and would actually end up making it sometimes, using the techniques, but producing his own thing and he said he never, ever believed he could go along to somewhere and do that. And he could not believe how he had been given the opportunity...

Another important factor that differentiates Project eARTh from many other time-limited activities is that it often supports people over a longer period than is usual, as a support worker noted.

A lot of people find it difficult to trust somebody, so going somewhere new, it takes a long time to settle in and to adjust, and then people feel safe...A lot of places that you go to, you can only go for a set length of time, and then you have to stop, and that's when you're just settling in...When people go to groups for a small length of time...that support is only, you know, for...that amount of time. And for some people, it takes a long time to build up trust...

I think what made Project Earth very different as well, was there were some people that might have long gaps because of struggling with mental health, and the fact that they could just come back and just slot in. And I do believe that we nurtured and created an environment to help people feel very accepted.

Yet another aspect of Project eARTh that differentiates it from other provision, according to a support worker, is the diversity of participants.

The other thing about Project Earth, which made it different was it was unbelievably diverse...every intersectionality you could think of...and that, I think, is very unusual, because you tend to get groups where people go along and think, "Oh, I don't fit in here, I'm not the same as anybody else". So that, I think was something else that made Project Earth very special...

Thinking about what they had learnt themselves through volunteering at Project eARTh, volunteers mentioned feeling part of a team and using their skills, as well as enjoying socialising and feeling part of a community:

I can do the [hands on] bit I love, and I can be helpful the tables and washing up...I can still use my skills a bit...

I feel like I've got purpose...I don't want to just sit around doing nothing...it's good for me as well, for my wellbeing...to get out and do something....I look forward to seeing people.

Conclusions

Project eARTh is clearly highly valued by participants. The importance of the project to participants is demonstrated by the numbers attending – and in many cases continuing to attend over several years. Participants, artists and volunteers concur that benefits for participants include opportunities to both extend and deepen social networks; support both in times of crisis and on a more long-term basis; pride and a sense of achievement in artwork produced; and activities that support relaxation or offer a distraction from issues they are facing. Participants reported feeling better after a workshop on

93% of occasions, and 90% of participants used positive words to describe their feelings at the end of sessions.

In participant surveys completed during the 2023-24 project year:

- 84% of participants had a higher 'making connections' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 53% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline
- 69% of participants had a higher 'wellbeing' score in the follow up survey than they had done in the baseline.

The timing of participant surveys in relation to the gradual lifting of Covid restrictions and reopening of various services make it tricky to draw firm conclusions about the impact of engagement with Project eARTh over time. However, current data indicate that joining Project eARTh often has a positive impact on participants' wellbeing during the first 6 months of attendance. Improvements in confidence/resilience and social connections tend to take longer to develop and are evidenced over a longer time period.

The main challenge reported by artists is the large size of groups. This means that volunteers and support workers are critical to allow everyone to engage in the activities. Project eARTh has been exploring possible ways to address the challenge of increasing demand, for example, fortnightly groups, more group sessions or parallel sessions in different rooms. However, it is acknowledged that, if demand continues at current levels (and other wellbeing support in the area continues to be in scarce supply), it will be difficult to meet demand for places and the project is likely to continue to need to operate a waiting list.