

UNITY Festival 2023

Ouseburn Community Centre - Impact Case Study



"UNITY Festival 2023 was an opportunity for people from all walks of life to come together to be part of a community, explore the natural world and consider what we can do to make a difference. Created with diversity at its heart this playful, creative free Festival was co-designed with community groups we work with across the North East of England."

Claire Webster Saaremets, Artistic Director, Skimstone Arts

UNITY Festival 2023 took place at Ouseburn Community Centre on Saturday 25 March from 10am to 5pm. This FREE music and arts Festival celebrated humanity, nature and social action. Including live music, performance, arts, exhibitions, creative workshops and outdoors trails Festival-goers of all ages took part in a jam-packed programme of events.

Now in its third year, UNITY Festival 2023 built on the legacy of previous Festivals to lay a strong foundation for future creative activity in Newcastle upon Tyne. This year's Festival consolidated existing relationships with artists, partners and organisations such as Action Asylum, the Natural History Society of Northumbria and Nii Qwartey Owoo whilst also nurturing new relationships including those with Ouseburn Community Centre, Hannabiell and the Midnight Blue Collective, Lawnmowers' Beat This, Circus Central, Ouseburn Trust and the West End Refugee Service.

Outputs/Outcomes:

- **83** diverse artists were commissioned and delivered **19** events throughout the day underpinning our core programming values of representation, inclusivity, quality and equality
- **10** live performances, **7** interactive workshops and participatory events, **3** exhibitions and **3** talks took place throughout the day.
- **234** unique visitors attended the Festival taking part in **498** active participant sessions. Of the sample data gathered 45% of visitors lived across Newcastle upon Tyne, 19.4% from Stockton-on-Tees, 16.1% from outside the region (including Glasgow, Bath and Malton in Yorkshire) 9.7% from North Tyneside, 6.4% from Gateshead and 3% from Middlesbrough.
- Content about UNITY Festival reached **36,604** people via social media in March 2023 - 27,861 people via Facebook, 1,472 people via Instagram and achieved 7,271 impressions on Twitter.
- **410** users visited Skimstone Arts website to find out more about the Festival in March 2023 of which 79.4% were new visitors.
- **10** volunteers from across the region worked together with the core team to support the effective event management of the Festival.



Feedback:

“Not knowing what to expect I was amazed to see the variety of activities and was blown away by the energy on display. Well done for being a true inclusive community programme, wonderful.” **Audience Member**

“I loved the variety of events and that there was something for everyone, it's so special to be amongst such a diverse crowd that is so positive, welcoming and vibrant. I liked how relaxed the environment felt, and being able to dip in and out.” **Audience Member**

“Taking part was important on a personal level. It was the first time in three years I'd written anything for display or performance and I'd suffered so much with loss of confidence that I'd cleared out everything I'd written before. Taking part was part of a process of regaining some confidence and a belief again in my creativity. Meeting up with people in the workshops in Byker was excellent and the support from Skimstone gave safety for small risks.” **Artist**

“Unity Festival displayed work that really encouraged conversation and represented people from a wide range of creative and cultural backgrounds. I got involved as I thought it would be a great way to get involved in the local community as well as meet people from other communities and backgrounds. Getting involved pushed me out of my comfort zone as it was the first time stewarding at a public event which I feel has helped me grow.” **Room Steward Volunteer**

Together with our communities we:

- Engaged young people and communities with lived refugee experience, learning disabilities, poor mental health, social anxiety, those living with Autism Spectrum Disorder and individuals from other disadvantaged backgrounds who feel marginalised by society in the creation, commissioning and delivery of UNITY Festival across co-collaborators and audiences.
- Built on a successful Byker community commissioning group pilot from UNITY Festival in 2022 and recruited a new community commissioning group based in Stockton-on-Tees.
- Celebrated diversity through the careful yet risk-taking programming of artists and events with, by and for the above target groups.
- Invested in artistic, creative and production skills of target groups and promoted confidence and visibility to new audiences.
- Supported our target groups to access regular workshops, events and production opportunities resulting in a festival featuring content relevant to them.
- Commissioned new work by diverse artists that responded to the themes of humanity, diversity and nature that encouraged positive social action and gave opportunities to perform, exhibit and screen live to a wide range of audiences from across the North East of England.
- Developed and nurtured artistic and commissioning communities in least engaged areas within rural and urban settings across North East of England.

The key outputs we achieved through this project were:

1. Encouraged participation from diverse young people and residents from different cultural backgrounds, life challenges, ages and faiths/non-faiths to work together and create new community connections creating positive wellbeing and good health and a platform for voices to be heard and listened to.
2. Lay the foundation for participants from different cultural backgrounds to feel a confidence to be part of cultural activity that makes a positive contribution to their region.
3. Connected, nurtured and empowered diverse communities by developing untapped strengths and skills in local people, promoting active participation and celebrating their achievements and supporting them in reaching their full potential.



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