

UNITY Festival 2023 Preston Park Museum - 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 Preston Park Museum on Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 March from 10am to 4pm. 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, musician and choreographer Nii Quartey Owoo, rapper and singer song-writer Kema Kay and photographer Kev Howard whilst also nurturing new relationships including those with Preston Park Museum, Hannabiell and the Midnight Blue Collective, RSPB, Tin Arts, an inclusive dance organisation based in Durham, dance artist and digital animator Jem Clancy and performance artist Yuvel Soria.

Outputs/Outcomes:

- **98** diverse creative practitioners were commissioned and delivered **33** events throughout the weekend underpinning our core programming values of representation, inclusivity, quality and equality
- **16** live performances, **9** interactive workshops and participatory events, **3** exhibitions and **5** talks took place throughout the day.
- **1828** unique visitors attended the Festival taking part in **1423** active participant sessions.
- 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.
- **27** volunteers from across the region worked together with the core team to support the effective event management of the Festival.



Feedback:

"I love how Skimstone arts group made us do some good dances, It was really body warming and uniting. I am a 29 year old female from Namibia... I am a good dancer and actor. Found out through Action Asylum." **Audience Member**

"The Music! The songs had important things to say and the music was complex and unified - great musicians!" **Audience Member**

"I had to come back today because yesterday was so much fun, we had to dance, to do some drums, doing singing. It was very fun. I meet up with people, many new ideas. My best thing was the exhibition, it opened so many perceptions of me, I was not expecting it to be so ginormous." **Audience Member**

"The UNITY Festival was a very good festival for the community, different music, video, food, I like, I'm happy here." **Audience Member**

"It was just fab, just different, so much energy, it was unbelievable, it made everyone feel happy." **Audience Member**

"I didn't expect to be the first person contact at the Festival. I enjoyed interacting with the visitors at the entrance as I welcomed them to the Festival. You guys are doing lovely work and the interactions and support you are providing to artists seems to be yielding good fruits after participating in the Unity Festival." **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.