

INSPIRING EARLY YEARS



LITTLE CREATIVES CASE STUDY



Inspire
Culture | Learning | Libraries



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Little Creatives Case Study

What did we set out to do?

Inspire Nottinghamshire Libraries, like most public library services, have a strong track record of work with children aged under 5 and their families. Libraries across Nottinghamshire run regular rhyme sessions and story sessions attracting tens of thousands of children annually.

We wanted to build on this foundation to enhance our offer to our youngest customers and develop an exciting cultural programme for early years children and their families. Supported by Arts Council England, National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding we wanted the programme to introduce early years children to new experiences, support their learning and language skills and

to create memorable and fun experiences in the library. The early years programme had three strands: one focused on visual arts (*Little Creatives*), one on music (*Adventures in Music*) and one on story and drama (*Story Explorers*).

Sessions took place at our largest 12 libraries between 2018 – 2023.



Little Creatives is the name of the visual art strand which had a development arc over the period of the funding to:

- **support artists development**
- **deliver workshops to early years children and their families**
- **create a library product**
- **share the learning with the sector**

A team of professional artists have been working creatively to help early years children learn new skills and have multi-sensory fun, playful and creative experiences in nursery settings and Inspire Libraries across Nottinghamshire.

Appendix 1a:
Wording from our 18-22 NPO application

Appendix 1b:
Wording from our 22-23 NPO extension year

How did we do it?

We offered the opportunity for artists to apply for the project to develop their arts practice for an early year's audience. A team of five local artists with very diverse arts practice and little experience with this age group were selected.

Appendix 2: Meet the artists



consult

We commissioned Hemsalls, an early years consultancy, to devise a programme of training and support.

The artists worked with the consultant first in a training and peer support model to identify how their practice and workshop delivery could fit into Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and to explore play and modification of delivery whilst remaining an artist and not an early years teacher.



action

This moved into an action research phase with the five artists venturing out across the county delivering sessions to small groups of families in libraries and to children and leaders in early years settings.

Each session was 45 minutes long, focused on ages 2-5 as the advertised target age and supported learning and development milestones.



workshops

These workshops, whilst providing a fantastic offer to the children and their families, were as much about the artists finding their way through experimental delivery to hone their offer and reflect on their practice with the consultant and each other.

As we came to the end of this phase Covid struck and in person delivery ceased.

We moved the workshops online so families could continue to join in, acknowledging the importance of early years development during a difficult and isolating time. Families were encouraged to enjoy the processes that led to exploring, discovering, and making together.

Little Creatives workshops helped little ones unleash their creative imagination and develop new skills as they splodged, splatted, scribbled and squidged!



INSPIRING EARLY YEARS



Little
Creatives
book

artist
activities

focus
groups

learned
experience

See more about the project here!
inspireculture.org.uk/LittleCreatives

After all the in person and digital delivery the artists were asked to revisit the training materials and reflectively map their developed sessions back against the EYFS and early years learning and development goals. They identified the activities and approaches that worked best for taking on to the product stage.

After consideration of different product options, we selected to commission a designer and illustrator to help us transform 25 of the artists

"Really sensory and touchy feely which was great for little people."

activities into a Little Creatives book, for parents and children to do together at home using easy and cheap materials.

Each activity includes a key to show parents how the learning and development milestones can be supported by doing this activity.

"It was nice to do something different with my daughter."

"Great that children can work with fab resources and ideas and creative ideas."



INSPIRING EARLY YEARS



The book is spiral bound and has a tent design cover allowing the book to free stand on the table between the adult and child with simple visual instructions on the child page and more detailed information, materials and the EYFS key on the adult side.

We worked with a focus group to get feedback from early years families on a range of draft layouts for the book pages and it was the very visual instructions that both children and adults preferred.

The book brings together everything we have learnt and the experiences we have gathered. It will be available to issue from Inspire Libraries from 2023.

Artists delivered sessions to be featured in the book in 76 new Little Creatives sessions in spring 2023 to 18 Nottinghamshire Libraries to promote the forthcoming book.

Appendix 3: Little Creatives Flyer

Appendix 4: Little Creatives Book example page

"Thank you! A lovely free experience. We both really enjoyed it. My daughter was sad when it was over!"

"Fantastic for child with speech and language needs! Thank you!"

Thanks to additional funding from the [Miner2Major Landscape Partnership Scheme](#) we were able to deliver Little Creatives workshops in libraries and community settings beyond our NPO libraries.

A retrospective exhibition of photographs and artworks that tell the story of this journey of learning together is on tour in Inspire Libraries until September 2023.





What were the results?

4 full days training and 1 observation and feedback per artist were delivered by Hemsalls.

The artists worked in 18 libraries, 11 early years settings, 2 community settings and online, and delivered 278 sessions in person and 10 recorded online workshops.

Each session was 45 mins long and had an average of 12 children in early years settings groups and 10 children plus accompanying adults in libraries.

Sessions were offered free 95% of tickets booked and average attendance was 76%

Over 95% of participants enjoyed the session on the feedback cards and 100% said they would do a similar session again

Although many sessions were tested each artist developed a minimum of 5 strong workshops to take through to the product stage.

Although each artist works in a different art form, each workshop had common threads:

- **A warm welcome to the child**
- **Often delivered on the floor to avoid unsuitable height furniture**
- **Gradual reveal of materials at child pace**
- **Child-led**
 - *Artist has a plan but is willing to change*
 - *Parents participate but are led by their child*
 - *Options are given but the child can take their own path with the materials*
 - *Developing child decision making through choice*
- **Process not product**
- **Fun**



Great activity today! Lots of resources — just enough input from the provider — resources well aimed at the age group/abilities.



What did we learn?

development age

The development age bands for early years are quite small, 6 age bands for 0 – 5. Understanding these bands and their overlaps was extremely helpful when thinking about the different activities that may work in a public offer.

In early years settings delivery, the children are grouped by age, but in a Library setting the age bracket given on an event as “suitable for” is inevitably more than one developmental age band and families booking onto sessions often include a sibling who may be below or above the advertised “suitable for” age.

training

The training phase of this project equipped the artists with this underpinning knowledge of the development stages and allowed them to dynamically differentiate the delivery in sessions.

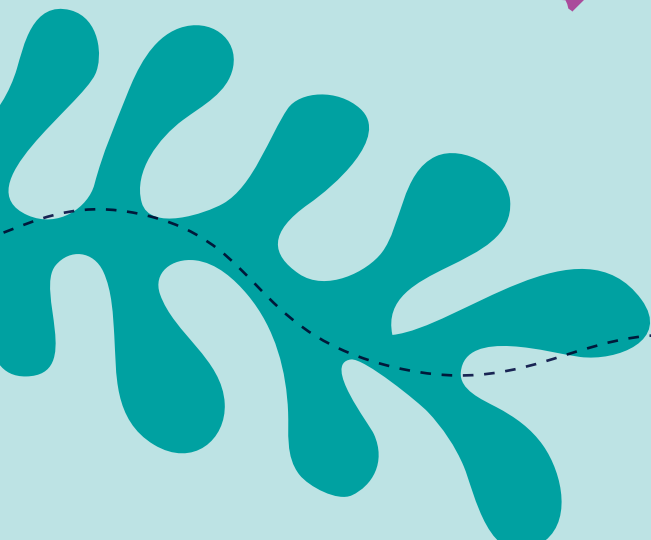
The activities in the book give a suggested age and offers extension activities that could be used to stretch the learning.

When we started the training, the artists ideas were too complex for the age group. The building of early years knowledge and the simplification of ideas happened simultaneously, breaking activities down into smaller parts and enjoying the exploration through play of each element of a process. There was more focus on process than product.

creative research

The team spent several weeks on mutually creative research. It turns out there are many similarities between the way young children play and experience new materials and the way artists work. The adaption to being child led in sessions came quite naturally to the team.

The Inspire team, the consultant and the artists formed a web of mutual support. Artists were very much encouraged to take risks and experiment. It was okay to try and fail and modify to support their own development whilst the children and families had fun. We set up a private Facebook group and shared and discussed how different approaches went to help evolve the ideas.

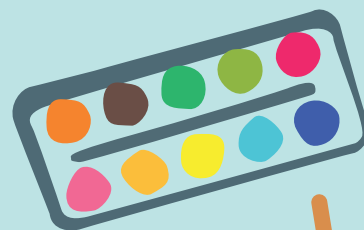


The project has upskilled all involved:

- ▶ The artists are trained and experienced at early years delivery both for Inspire and other organisations they may work for strengthening the local arts sector.
- ▶ Inspire programmes staff have underpinning EYFS knowledge to support delivery and make decisions on programme direction for 2023-26
- ▶ Participants have seen new ways of using creativity with their children and can borrow the book to continue activities at home.
- ▶ The opportunity to reflect on 5 years of development and share that with library, early years and arts colleagues has helped us to shape the next phase of the work and share the learning and knowledge to sector colleagues looking to develop something similar.
- ▶ We will be recruiting a new cohort of Little Creatives artists in 2023 as part of our NPO 23-26 targeting new art forms and developing a different product by the end of that funding round. Our current cohort will take on the role of mentors. We want to repeat the model of artists CPD, staff and artists support through action research, library delivery and build the early years skills of local artists in our area.

Top tips

- *Secure funding to make it happen*
- *Get expert help*
- *Take time to develop the skills*
- *Be willing to fail*
- *Be clear about the spaces you are using with the artists*
- *Set up a safe and supportive space for the artists*
- *Deal with intellectual property for the product openly and upfront*



Appendix 1a

Wording from our 18-22 NPO application

We will develop a new visual arts programme to stimulate imagination and creativity, develop fine motor skills and provide parents/carers with tools to engage their children in art activities.

In year 1 we will commission early years specialists to support the programme's development & evaluation ensuring a sound evidence base. We will recruit professional artists to deliver arts activity & identify a cohort of frontline library service staff to provide support. Artists & staff will receive training in early years provision, creative approach & foundation stage curriculum.

An 18-month programme of visual arts activities will be delivered by artists via Creativity Clubs across 12 libraries. Through continuous evaluation artists will identify the most engaging and effective activities to meet the programme's aims.

In year 3 artists will work with designers to produce Creative How-to Activity Cards suitable for parents/carers to use at home supporting families to embed arts & creativity into their daily lives.

After testing, the activity cards will be reproduced and made available for loan through libraries & for sale. We will look to sell the cards to other library authorities and early years settings thus extending the reach of the project. Staff supporting the sessions will use the cards as a basis for additional clubs.

These fun and creative Under 5s programmes will give an early cultural learning experience that equips children with the skills they need for future learning.

Appendix 1b

Wording from our 22-23 NPO extension year

The Little Creatives programme has seen supportive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) delivered for the selected artists and Inspire staff, working with consultants to learn about the Early Years Foundation Stage and Early Years (EY) learners. The deconstructing and analysis of artists practice to develop delivery models suitable for EY has been successful.

Workshop development in partnership with both EY settings and libraries has honed the offer through reflection and supportive evaluation into a defined set of workshops ready for development as a set of resources.

In year three, unable to meet and collaborate, the workshops were developed into a set of online videos and promoted to families at home. These remain as a legacy resource on our website.

By the end of year four we will have commissioned the resource development with a designer and a EY consultant and have ensured the Intellectual Property rights of the artists and Inspire, this is supported by the work currently being commissioned following our ACE Intellectual Property audit.

We will use year five to complete the original planned programme, launch the product and share with the sector. We will deliver a new programme of Little Creatives workshops in libraries to promote the resource to both parents and library staff.

Appendix 2

Meet the artists



CHRIS LEWIS-JONES

Chris Lewis-Jones is based at Fleet Hub in Belper. He is an artist-flaneur, a 'hopeful traveller' for whom the journey is more important than the destination.

His practice includes drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, installation, music, spoken word performance and much more.

The work he does in the studio is enhanced by the work he does in library, community and educational contexts. He is an evangelist or the arts in general and drawing in particular.

chrislewisjonesartist.com

Appendix 2

Meet the artists

DAWN TAYLOR



Dawn Taylor is a practitioner and teacher of art and yoga.

Dawn is a qualified yoga teacher with 16 years' experience. Delivering family focused and children's yoga has become a regular and rewarding experience. Her family and children's yoga sessions are fun, interactive and multi-sensory. The yoga story takes children on a magical, animated journey where they explore physical movement and relaxation in a non-competitive environment. The sessions are enriched by nurturing an awareness of mindfulness.

When creating her own art, she draws inspiration from many sources such as the beauty of nature, her travels around India and yogic lifestyle. Her work incorporates a variety of methods including mono print, watercolour, collage and inks. She has a love of using bright, fluid colours and patterns. Her 'soul art' is created with heartfelt expression and often include positive affirmations. Her art is inspirational, and her teaching style facilitates self-expression and confidence building and recognises the healing power of creativity.

Dawn has a wealth of experience of delivering sessions in a variety of settings. She currently works for several charities and teaches in nurseries, schools, libraries, care homes and corporate settings. Dawn has taught extensively to adults and children with learning disabilities and always aims to make sessions person centred, inclusive and accessible.

yogadawn.me.uk

Appendix 2

Meet the artists



ELAINE WINTER

Elaine Winter is a Nottinghamshire based artist who mixes traditional and experimental printmaking process with other media.

Her work is mainly figurative and based around investigations of human relations with a focus on expressions of empathy. Elaine has had solo exhibitions, exhibited through Open Studios Notts, had work selected for international print shows and is a previous winner of the Harley Prize.

Much of Elaine's time is spent working in the community in participatory arts practice. She works as an arts educator throughout Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire schools, is part of the team of artist practitioners at Inspire and is an Associate Artist at both Nottingham Lakeside Arts and New Art Exchange. She has experience of working with all ages from early years upwards and has worked with a wide range of groups, including refugee groups, adults with learning disabilities, those living with dementia and people receiving hospice care.

elainewinter.co.uk

Appendix 2

Meet the artists



MICHELLE READER

Sculptor Michelle Reader makes her sculptures from recycled materials in her workshop at the Harley Foundation Studios on the Welbeck Estate in North Nottinghamshire. She has been making unique figurative sculptures from household waste and found objects since 1997.

Her sculptures are often representations of the natural world - for example a wild goat standing on a mountain of electrical waste, a bumblebee with a gas mask for a face, or a vulture with a bike seat head and paintbrush beard. You can find her sculptures of a prehistoric wild horse and modern-day racehorse - made from agricultural and architectural metalwork salvaged on the Welbeck Estate - encountering each other in the courtyard of The Harley Gallery. And her 'Great Wave' of waste plastics has recently been installed as part of a new exhibition about climate change in the National Space Centre in Leicester.

Michelle's sculptures tell stories through materials and encourage people to consider how things they would normally throw away have the potential for creative reuse. Alongside making sculptures and installations to commission she also runs eco art workshops for schools, adults, children and families.

michelle-reader.co.uk

Appendix 2

Meet the artists



MANDY BRAY

Mandy Bray works in collage, printmaking and mixed-media sculpture.

She creates colourful collaged drawings exploring figurative, architectural and landscape compositions using found papers and mixed media. These are then developed into original, hand-printed, one-off, and limited-edition relief prints using linocut and mono-printing processes.

The small, mixed-media box sculptures she makes are in response to the structure of a found piece of cardboard packaging or old wooden box and incorporate collage, painted papers, off-cuts from her own prints, printed ephemera and other materials. Vintage photographs and fashion photography, formal garden design, architecture, dioramas and shop window displays, and 19th century figurative ceramics all provide starting points for her work.

She also finds inspiration in the colour and pattern of man-made materials, multiples/units of everyday objects and is an avid collector of found papers, used envelopes, magazine imagery and old packaging boxes, which might eventually find their way into a small drawing or finished piece of work.

Her work has been exhibited in local and national exhibitions, arts festivals and open studios events; she has made prints to commission, led an after-school art club, delivered visual arts sessions in a primary school and held printmaking workshops for adults. She works in her studio at her home near Newark, Nottinghamshire.

[facebook.com/mandybrayartist](https://www.facebook.com/mandybrayartist)

Appendix 3

Little Creatives Flyer



Appendix 4

Little Creatives Book example page

