



IMPACT REPORT 2020/21 - 2022/23

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Creative Futures offers transformative experiences through the arts for children, young people, families and communities – especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. All of our programmes are designed to effect positive change in society whilst offering free, high-quality and accessible participatory arts experiences.

We have 3 focus areas: early years (children aged 0-5 years, their families and educators); care experienced children and young people; and children with special educational needs especially deaf children. Every project is uniquely devised to meet the specific needs of each group we work with (e.g. speech and communication skills, well-being, resilience) and delivered by professional practitioners from our network of inspiring artists. We reach 2,500+ individuals every year across London and the Southeast, and thousands more through our free online resources.

This impact report covers the 3-year period from autumn 2020 to summer 2023, and therefore includes periods during which the normal operation of our work was disrupted by the government's disastrous lockdown policies – the negative effects of which are still resonating amongst many of the families that we engage with. The lockdowns removed normal human interaction – crucial for young children's development as well as for the mental wellbeing of all. In areas particularly characterized by poverty, over-crowding and the anxieties associated with these conditions, the lockdowns exacerbated existing inequalities, and have further widened the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children – a gap that is so wide by the time children start school many of them fail to ever catch up or reach their potential.

Creative Futures transferred almost all of its programmes online during this period, and has been working hard ever since to ensure that face-to-face opportunities are provided for children and families in order to undo some of the damage inflicted.

Vision

Ensuring every child has access to experiencing and participating in high-quality arts activity.

Mission

Creative Futures provides transformative experiences to children, young people and families, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, through bespoke and inspiring arts programmes.

Values

- **Child-led** – putting the child or young person at the centre of our work, from devising and planning through delivery to evaluation.
- **High quality** – our programmes are shaped and led by experienced, reflective artists and producers drawing on research and our own learning.
- **Inspiring** – we aim for every project we deliver to be outstanding, meaningful and memorable for all the children, young people, families and professionals involved.
- **Locally-driven** – ensuring that every project is driven by the specific needs and strengths of its local community; and finding new ways of embedding the arts at the heart of every child's experience.
- **Democratic** – aspiring to be a culturally democratic organisation where our community of artists and participants shape our work together and are all treated ethically, fairly, equally and respectfully.



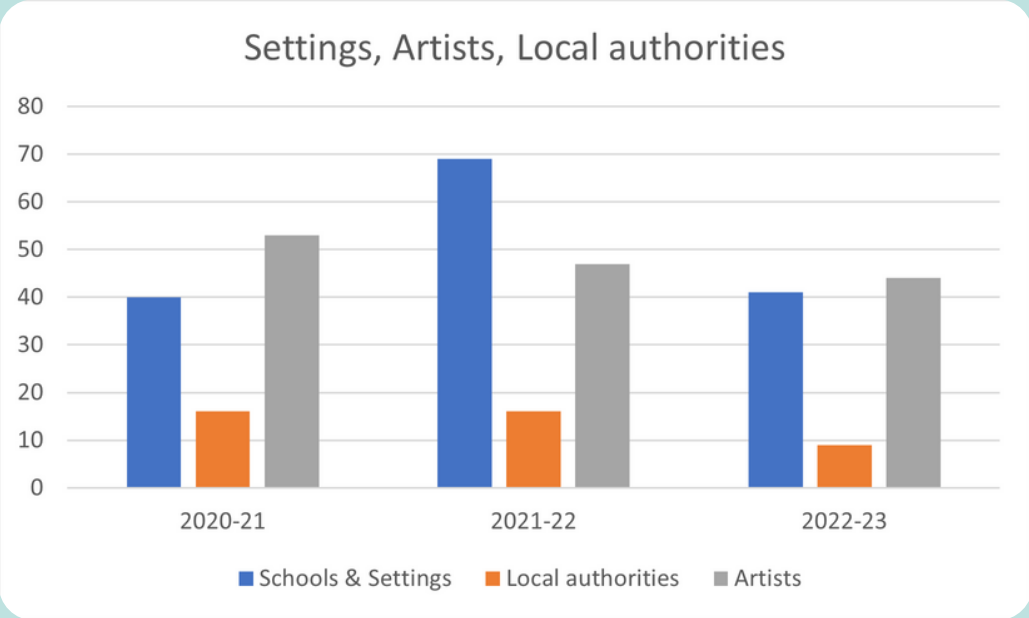
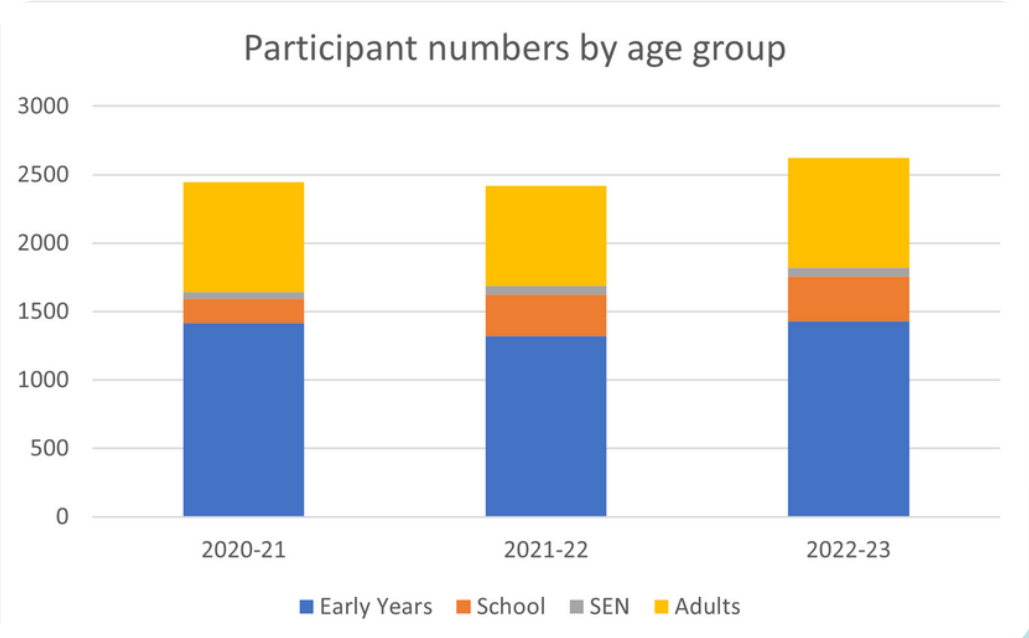
2021 - 2023 in numbers

1,000+ workshops delivered each year

2,500 + direct beneficiaries per year, the majority under 5 years old

The highest concentration of participants (37%) are in north Westminster, where Creative Futures is based

At least 60% of participants from BAME communities



Early years programmes

Our early years work falls into 2 categories:

- Programmes with families and communities
- Programmes in pre-school settings

Early Years: Communities & Families

Our flagship families and communities initiative is **Community Families**, which now dovetails with our hospital collaboration, Music at Heart, to form a unique 'Musical Care Pathway'.

Community Families has grown from a weekly resident-led pilot project in Queen's Park ward in 2013, to now providing 9 free and accessible family music sessions every week across north Westminster.

We reach **500** families with children aged 0-4 years from this particularly disadvantaged part of London every year, and collaborate with numerous local partners including Paddington Development Trust whose Maternity Champions support some sessions, Westminster's local Family Hubs, Westbourne Park Family Centre, and others.

North Westminster is characterised by multiple markers of deprivation (socio-economic, health and life-expectancy, children living in poverty, etc); yet it has a strong and vibrant sense of community. Creative Futures is proud to be an integral part of that community, particularly for families with pre-school children.



**“Creative Futures is held in such high regard”
(Cllr Tim Roca, Deputy Leader Westminster City Council, Cabinet Member for Young People)**



Key aims and impacts

Reducing isolation

Strengthening parent-child attachment (bonding)

Building confidence and well-being among parents and children

94% of parents felt less isolated

100% said sessions enhanced bonding with their baby.

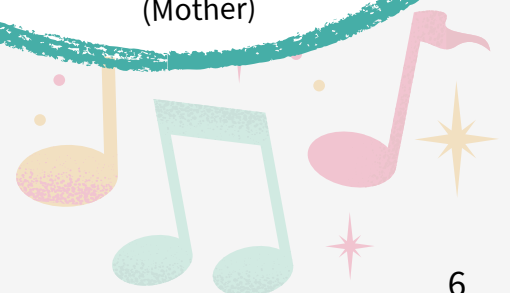
100% felt that sessions had a positive impact on their child's wellbeing and self-confidence.

96% of parents said they felt more confident

"I don't have family here, I don't speak much English, I don't know many people. I haven't seen people in the pandemic" (parent, 2021)

"The quality of care is at the heart of the programme's success...where parents are welcomed from the moment they step in, and leave with a smile on their face." (Evaluator, 2021)

"Our community is quite divided. This is the one place where you meet people from different backgrounds - suddenly you recognize people and start to have conversations, and that can have a knock-on effect for the wider community." (Mother)





“This exceptional initiative addresses some of our society’s most fundamental challenges such as social isolation and equity.

By consistently widening access to opportunities it has transformed the experience of parenting for hundreds of families improving well-being, helping parents to bond with their child, feel part of a wider community, and be empowered through information and support networks.

This work has the power to radically shift life chances of children from vulnerable backgrounds as well as reduce anxiety and social isolation.” (Evaluator, 2021)



“I’ve seen the impact in my son. He’s turning 3 and has been singing all these songs. That’s leading his speech development as he’s quite delayed in his speech.”
(Mother)



Musical Care Pathway

This unique concept began in 2022 after consultation with families and family centres identified a need for small-group sessions just for vulnerable families; and the start of a new partnership with the Perinatal Mental Health team at St Mary's Hospital.

Our Musical Care Pathway has 3 stages outlined below. We are delighted some mothers have progressed through every stage of our pathway with their child:

MUSIC at HEART

Music at Heart @ St Mary's Hospital

Therapeutic singing sessions for mothers (and their babies)
with acute mental health conditions and postnatal depression

Referrals from by the Perinatal Mental Health team at St Mary's Hospital

Nurture Groups

Weekly music sessions in 2 Family Hubs for
vulnerable families with children aged 0-2 years

Referrals from Family Hubs and their partners

Community Families drop-ins

6 open-access music sessions per week for
mums, dads, carers and children 0-4 years

Community venues, Family Hubs,
supported by Maternity Champions



MUSIC HEART

“As many of the mothers had their babies during lockdown, the trauma they have experienced through isolation and lack of access to key services is palpable. Some of the babies found it difficult to settle in unfamiliar surroundings, and are not used to other people. The music and singing helped to create a sense of calm in the room, which had an immediate effect on the babies and mothers.”

(Deputy Head of Family Centre)

“I feel safe in the group, it's a warm and non-judgemental community where all the mums are in the same position. It's chill, you don't even have to sing, it's just a nice place to be with your baby”
(parent)

“It had a positive impact on my relationship with my child”
(parent)

"it's been such a positive experience and very helpful for my mental health"
(parent)

“A support network was established organically, and the mothers incentivised each other to attend the sessions, even when they were feeling unable to leave the house.” (Early Years worker)

"The sessions are the best part of my week"
(parent)



Early Years : Schools & Nurseries

The foundation of our work in early years settings is a multi-faceted programme called Music for Change, which ran initially in 11 settings in north Westminster from 2015-17, and has continued further afield since. It included in-setting music delivery as well as early years workforce development and a collaboration between our musicians and NHS Speech and Language Therapists over a 2-year period. Every large-scale programme we have initiated since then has built upon the progressive learning from this initiative.



Sound Communities is a professional development programme for Early Years Professionals exploring the theme of music and communication by building reflective practice communities. Clusters of settings took part in Haringey, Harrow, Barnet, East Sussex, Essex, Luton and Bedfordshire from 2018-22; and a new phase of the programme began in autumn 2022 in Brent.

Sound Communities targets early years settings with above average proportions of children aged 3-4 years with English as an Additional Language (EAL) or who have Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). In each locality we work with Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) from 6-10 settings each year through a mix of training sessions and In-setting mentoring, co-design and co-delivery.

Impact on EYPs

The quality and content of our CPD sessions was rated on average 9.5/10 by EYPs.

EYPs developed awareness of:

- children's musicality and what this looks like;
- the importance of observing the music that happens during children's play; and
- the musical environment in a setting and how to make it more engaging.

EYPs began to see

“that children's musicality is in everything they do without realising”..

Impact on children



“The children's confidence has improved. Children are better at speaking and listening. Children have had their self-esteem, confidence and morale boosted through music.” (EYP)

“[Impact on children has been] exceptional. It has been very exciting and interesting to attend training alongside planning, team teaching and reflecting and to then translate this into meaningful opportunities with the children. Their language developed really well and their vocabulary and sentence structure was directly improved. Always including pupils' ideas and allowing lots of room for improvisation ... has ensured that all the pupils accessed the sessions.” (EYP)

We saw particular impacts on EAL pupils, as noted by this participant:
“So many EAL pupils benefited from the range of music, song, dance, art and games alongside playing and inventing instruments and picking out patterns and beats with claves. The phonics links were ever so helpful as the use of sound buttons helped break down words and sentences through song and dance.” (EYP)

A free, comprehensive and award-winning Sound Communities resource is available online for early years teachers to access – created in partnership with ICAN.

www.soundcommunities.org.uk

Sound & Symbol



SOUND & SYMBOL

Sound & Symbol is designed to support children aged 3-4 years' learning and provision in music, communication, language, and emergent literacy. The project is rooted in research and practice and delivered by our specialist early years music practitioners alongside research input and evaluation by our colleagues from the UCL Institute of Education.

A successful small-scale trial took place in 2021-22 in four London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) nurseries in Barking & Dagenham, working with children and teachers to explore possibilities for practice with music and stories. Aiming to embed practice across the day and across the setting, our approach included working with child-initiated play, provocations in the environment and group activities and with story books, singing, instruments and sound-makers, movement and mark-making.

Sound & Symbol outcomes included:

Children's musical development

Children's musical skills were enhanced in composing songs and lyrics, developing understanding of concepts such as tempo and dynamics, using these to make creative choices and direct group playing, and developing skills in starting and stopping together.

"Musical skill development was clearly visible... there were multiple examples of children drumming in time to the pulse of sung songs. Children were also heard changing their drumming speed to enable them to fit in with others." (researcher)

Children's communication skills

The project was particularly impactful for non-verbal children. Journals kept by musicians and EYPs across the settings include numerous examples of non-verbal children having the opportunity to be highly communicative, express themselves and make connections: using gesture to direct the playing of a group, taking part in instrument conversations, and using movement to create duets with a partner.

Some children who were selectively mute also spoke their first words during the project, or participated in singing a song for the first time.

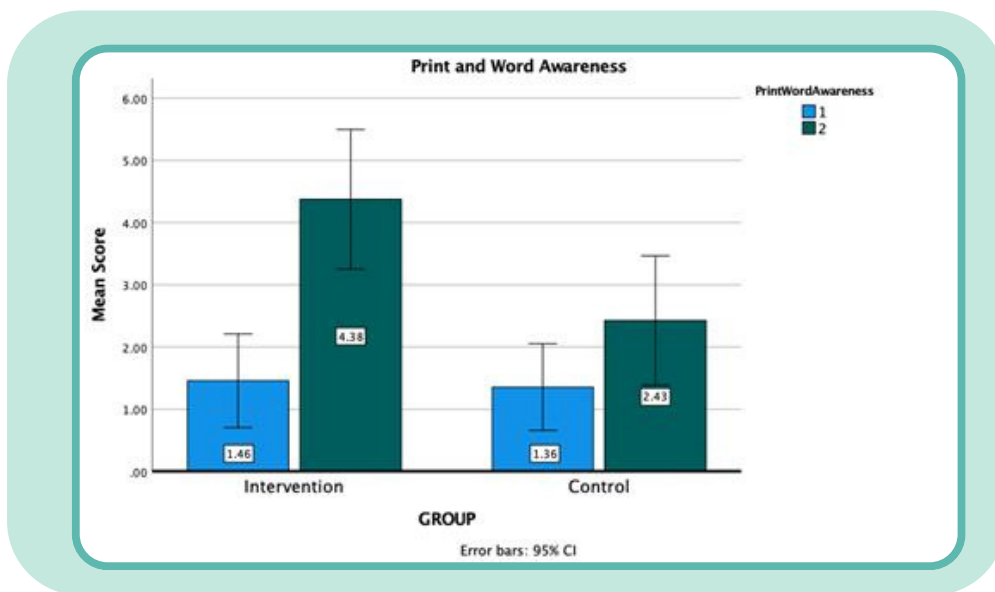




Sound & Symbol

Sound & Symbol also prompted significant impacts on children's print and word awareness, as demonstrated in this graph which shows that at follow-up testing after the intervention (green bars) the intervention group scores are significantly improved, bringing their achievement levels close to UK average on the standardised language assessments.

"We have seen such huge changes in the children's language and development and that is all thanks to the music sessions you have taught us. We have received such positive feedback from parents also". (EYP)



EYPs building musical confidence

EYPs involved in the project developed confidence and skills in music-making with children. Journals show that while the musicians usually led group activities at the start of the project, over the weeks EYPs started to co-lead and then take over.

One EYP made a resource pack including everything she had learnt to share with colleagues so that they could try the same activities. Importantly, the resource pack reflects not only activities and songs but also pedagogical approaches such as to allow space for children to input their ideas into the song.



Programmes with care experienced young people

Every year from 2021 to 2023, Creative Futures has collaborated with AccessHE, part of London Higher, in a film-making project with care experienced young people in east London. Despite the challenges of delivering the first of these projects entirely online due to covid restrictions, the young people created meaningful and personal films together as well as learning more about pathways into higher education.

In 2022 and 2023 we were generously hosted by the University of Coventry's Dagenham campus and also spent one day of each project at the Courtauld Institute. In 2021 there was additional input from the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, the University for the Creative Arts and Ravensbourne University London. These experiences enriched the programme for the participating young people, and provided an inspiring backdrop to their creative journeys.

"Not only has this experience been comforting but it's been challenging and very fun. I have learned so much, especially not to give up and to let things happen naturally." (Participant)

The projects build self-esteem and resilience, helped young people to make new friends, learn new creative skills, and explore further education. The films created included a collaborative group piece that looked at experiences of, and roles within, the care-system. The films also explored themes of identity, displacement, childhood, confidence, and silencing the inner critic.

"I got to meet new people and do things I had never done before and it was a lot of fun." (Participant)



Programmes for children with special educational needs

Sounding Out is Creative Futures' flagship music programme with deaf children in two mainstream London primary schools with deaf units: Laycock Primary (Islington) and Selwyn Primary (Newham).

Weekly music sessions are led by specialist music practitioners with small groups of children from Reception to Year 6, with activities adapted to the needs of each group. During the periods when schools were closed due to coronavirus lockdowns, the project continued online using pre-recorded videos and interactive online sessions.

As well as building skills in aspects of musicianship, Sounding Out also supports the children's emotional development and confidence, and aspects of their speech and communication. A wide range of musical activities is covered, including a focus on singing and vocalisation, and playing instruments, improvising, and creating group narrative compositions. Music visualization technology "Sing and See" helped to reinforce concepts of high and low pitch, and different timbres and frequencies, thus building skills and knowledge and providing a tool for composition activities with the older children.

"The children have experienced a range of songs and the opportunity to play and hear different instruments. There have been extremely rich learning opportunities" (Teacher of the Deaf).

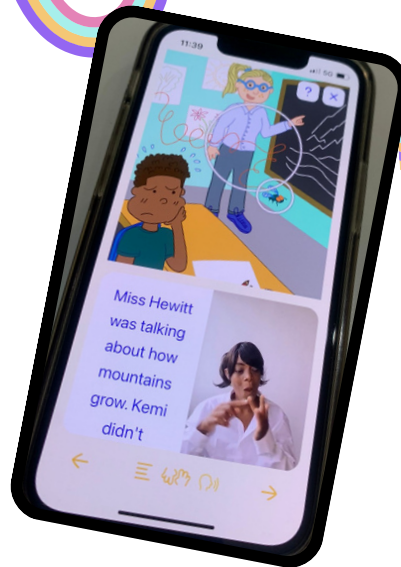
Call and response songs and copying the practitioner's varying vocalisations (e.g. making "sound effects" vocally such as car sounds, high and low pitches, varied intonation) were particularly successful in encouraging many children to use their voices confidently, without pressurizing those who did not want to use their voice. This approach supported children's speech development as well as verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

"We decided to allow children with more significant communication difficulties to engage in these opportunities to develop their communication" (Teacher of the Deaf)

"The sessions perfectly meet the needs of our children and it is wonderful to see their skills as well as their self-confidence develop every week" (Teacher of the Deaf)

Sounding Out reaches 50-60 children every year, who take part weekly during term-time. From autumn 2023 we are delighted to be expanding the project to a third primary school – Hague Primary in Tower Hamlets.





My Sound Stories

In late 2022, Creative Futures launched its first App, in collaboration with musician and Speech Language Therapist Phoebe Osborne.

'My Sound Stories' a digital resource to aid deaf or hearing-impaired children, and those aged 3-7 years with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), to engage with sounds and stories in order to support their speech and language development. The app enables a child, collaborating with a parent or teacher, to actively interact with an original story that combines different illustrations, sounds, music and voices that bring their story to life. We commissioned original creative components from freelance writers, actors, illustrators, and musicians that were used to animate four stories targeted at different ages and levels of ability. Two of these were adapted from stories written specifically for deaf children and published by Avid Language.

To date, we have more than 2,000 downloads and 5,000+ interactions.

"Really useful and fun app to develop children's listening and speech. Super fun and child friendly and easy to use. Excited to start using it with our specialist class of children with Developmental Language Disorder." (Teacher of the Deaf)



Music at Heart at the Royal London Hospital



2020/21 was the final phase of a 3-year programme of therapeutic music sessions with child patients at the Royal London Hospital. We collaborated with children and their parents to ease anxiety, reduce suffering, and aid so many aspects of early development that the children miss out on through the nature of their condition and their isolation in hospital.

Our musicians interacted with children at their bedsides on the wards through singing and instrumental dialogues, in paediatric Accident & Emergency, and at drop-in sessions for patients who were mobile enough to leave the ward and join the multi-sensory area known as the Healing Space.

Most children when visited at their bedside are uncomfortable and unhappy, but following a session of singing with the musicians they are demonstrably happier and more relaxed. Families notice the difference in their child and comment to that effect. Parents were surprised at the provision of music on the ward, and would often request that their child might be visited by the music team again before the end of the session.

Play Team staff, who co-ordinated our interactions, also commented that children who engaged in the music sessions become more vocal, as they 'find their voice' after the sessions.

A member of the Play Team described one particular interaction with a 2-year old girl with a chronic long term health condition: *"Mum was very keen for her to take part in the music session and what we saw was amazing: she began singing along with R and doing actions to some of the songs. She was fully engaged with playing the musical instruments and had a smile on her face the whole time. Mum began to cry during the session and when I asked if she was ok she just replied with "yes they are happy tears it's just so lovely to see her like this, and to have my little girl back and happy, she hasn't been like this the whole time here and now look she is singing and dancing." The child enjoyed the session so much that when it was over I had to leave some musical instruments with her because she wanted to carry on playing."* (Play Team)

We hosted a multi-arts "Take Over" event in the Healing Space for children from across the hospital and their siblings. This featured a central story about a magical Firebird which the 20 participating children helped to develop. We commissioned and printed a story book which was given to participants, and made available online. The day included art activities, music-making and spoken word, delivered by five Creative Futures artists.

According to an inhouse study by a medical student from Queen Mary's University, 100% of patients and their families had a positive change in their stay as a result of our project.



Projects in primary schools

Our Story

Our Story was a multi-arts project for Year 1 & 2 pupils at two Camden primary schools in 2021-22, devised to rebuild schools' face-to-face engagement in the arts following the government's covid lockdowns.

Ten workshops took place with each class every term throughout the academic year. 150 children from multiple cultural backgrounds took part. Class teachers and TAs were encouraged to actively participate and look upon the project as professional development.

Two professional artist practitioners collaborated on each session. Spoken Word was the central discipline that underpinned the project throughout the year, and each term the principal artist collaborated with a musician, visual artist or actor. At the schools' request, the artists co-created poems, artworks and songs to complement themes for each year's curriculum map. This helped teachers embed what was being taught in the classroom through a creative lens. Themes ranged from broad concepts such as Identity, Change and Climate, to traditional topics that included the Fire of London and continents of the world. The poems and artwork the children created were displayed in classrooms and along communal hallways, so parents were invited to see what they had produced. Towards the end of the summer term, the children gave a short performance of their poems, which was filmed. We also produced a booklet to feature all their poems, artworks and photos.

The project built and extended children's creative skills across multiple disciplines, as well as strengthening social-emotional development and self-confidence.

"Child M made the most remarkable arc in their confidence from the beginning of the project to the final day" (Class teacher). The teacher also pointed out that this child became eager to perform during the creative sessions, and this new confidence transferred to other lessons and activities.



Hopes & Futures

Hopes and Futures (2023) explored themes of navigating growth and change at a time of transition. 90 Year 6 pupils from Vaughan Primary School in Harrow explored their feelings around the transition from primary to secondary school through creative and interactive sessions involving discussion and creative activity. This included reflecting on their big wins in Year 6, thinking back over the best memories of their time in primary school, and thinking forward to what they might be excited or nervous about for their move to secondary school. Alongside personal stories, Hopes and Futures explored broader themes around diversity, culture, and self-expression to deepen their sense of community and connection to Harrow.

*"Doing this project has made me feel less anxious about going to secondary school. It was nice to talk to others in my classroom and hear about their thoughts. It made me feel like I'm not the only one feeling worried and that we have similar feelings."
(Year 6 participant)*

The project was delivered by two artists specialising in spoken word and movement, who inspired students to compose and perform their own spoken word poems.

*"The children have really loved this project. We've seen some of our most anxious students become more confident in presenting and talking about their experience of going to secondary school in a positive way."
(Year 6 Teacher)*

By the end of the project, students had each created an individual poem about change and a collaborative poem on diversity, which was beautifully presented in a printed project anthology.



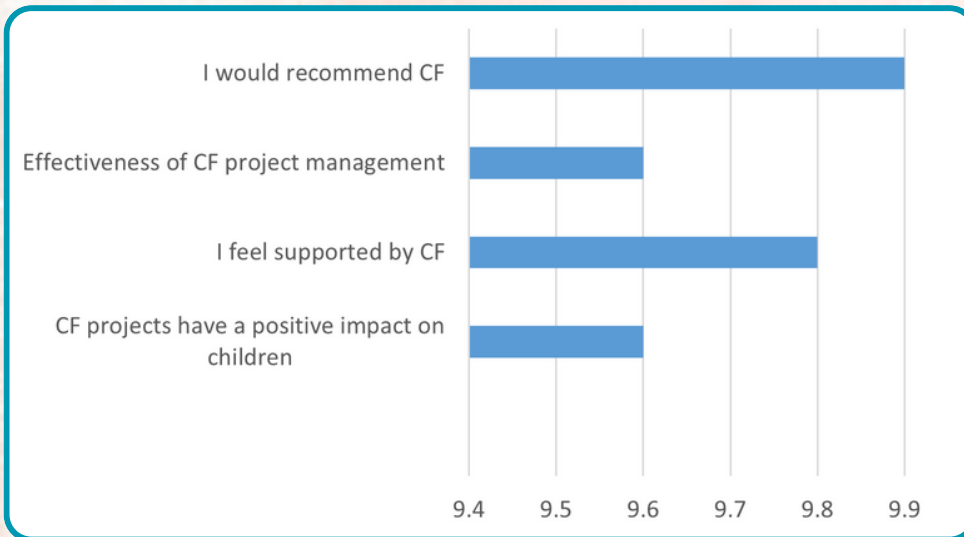
Nurturing our family of artists



Creative Network

Creative Futures is proud of its standing amongst its network of 100+ artist practitioners, who have a strong loyalty to the organisation. One of Creative Futures' founding aims was to nurture and support its family of artists, and to ensure that every project they are engaged to work on is professionally managed and well paid, with adequate (paid) preparation and reflection time. We encourage our artists to help us shape and develop each project idea, and to build their skills and professional practice through shared learning and reflection.

The following graph represents feedback from our artists on a recent poll, where artists were asked to rate Creative Futures (CF) on a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 is no impact and 10 is very positive):



*“Creative Futures could not be any better an organisation to work for”
(Practitioner)*

*“Thank you to the CF team for all your inspirational work and leadership”
(Practitioner)*

We invited our artist practitioners to use a few words to describe Creative Futures. Their full responses are summarised thus :



Partners and funders

Creative Futures has built a raft of partnerships across the education, arts and healthcare sectors. We collaborate with local councils and their service providers; with teams in the NHS; with schools, pre-schools and school improvement teams; with music hubs and arts organisations; with researchers, colleges and universities; and most importantly with local communities and the grassroots charities that best know the children and families they support.

Here are some of the partners with whom we are proud to collaborate:



Creative Futures would like to thank all of its funders for their support:

CAST, Chesterhill Charitable Trust, Clifford Chance Foundation, D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, Hedley Foundation, Ingles Charitable Trust, Investec, Ironmongers' Company Charity, London HQ Community Fund, Lottery Community Fund, Mrs Smith and Mount Trust, Queen's Park Community Council, Radcliffe Trust, Rathbone Brothers Foundation, Schroders, Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust, SEMPRE; and



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Thank you!

A big thankyou to all of our artists, researchers, collaborators, children, families, schools and communities: you are the life-blood of the organisation.

*From the Creative Futures team:
Julian, Vanessa, Sabrina, Lori
and the Board of Trustees*



Links and resources

→ Donate to our JustGiving page:



→ Listen to our Community Families album on Soundcloud



→ Explore our Sounding Out toolkit



→ Find out more about Sound Communities



→ Explore all the London Rhymes recordings





creative futures

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