



# Back to Ours

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## Final Evaluation Report

Ruth Melville, February 2020



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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1. About this report

This is the final evaluation report of Phase 1 of Back to Ours Creative People and Places (CPP) programme, which ran from mid 2017-Dec 2019. It arises from an approach which takes in keeping with national CPP approaches, foregrounds action learning within the evaluation, and thus a lot of the learning has fed directly into the programming through regular feedback to the Director and team, and through internal reports on specific areas of programming.

The structure of the report is based on Arts Council England's 3 National CPP Research Questions:

1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?
2. To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
3. Which approaches were successful and what were the lessons learned?

It draws on data from other work, particularly from reports by Dr Pip Gardner (based on interviews and focus groups with the staff team) and from Prof Franco Bianchini and Vickie Bissett at the Culture, Place and Policy Institute at the University of Hull (based on research on the Hubs), postcode analysis by Helen Corkery, and observation and analysis from the Chat to Ours volunteer research team as part of Back to Ours. A full methodology is included in [Appendix 2](#) below.

The report has five sections:

- Section 1 offers an introduction to Back to Ours and its context;
- Section 2 explores to what extent Back to Ours has achieved the aim of reaching new audiences;
- Section 3 explores how Back to Ours addresses the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of engagement;
- Section 4 outlines an emerging model of what works within Back to Ours' approach;
- Section 5 concludes and shares recommendations for next steps.

A separate summary version is also available covering the main findings and recommendations.

## 1.2. Back to Ours and Creative People and Places

Creative People and Places (CPP) is an Arts Council England funding programme which aims to engage new people in the arts through commissioning projects in areas of low arts engagement. The programme started in 2012 and initially funded 21 places (in three rounds in 2012, 2013 and 2014) and has been well received, with positive outcomes in reaching those least likely to engage in the arts, and across the full spectrum of socio-economic groups. As a result, a whole new programme (new CPP) has been commissioned and at time of writing it is expected that 10 more places will be funded.

CPP focuses on engaging new audiences with an offer which is excellent in terms of process and product, through building new and unusual partnerships beyond the arts. CPPs have been encouraged to develop their own models, but the focus on fully engaging people in the process of the art, and engaging new audiences have meant all have found they needed to do a lot of development work before delivery could start. The struggle to



get on with programming while still developing new models in a challenging field are well summed up by the two national learning documents.<sup>1</sup>

Most CPPs have been funded initially for three years, with an option to apply for extension funding for two further phases of three years. The model is front loaded, with funding dropping significantly in Phase 2 and then again in Phase 3. The aim of this is to encourage partnership funding, and a reduction in the reliance on ACE funding, however in practice, all CPPs have struggled to manage the timescales and the steep stepped reduction of funding.<sup>2</sup>

Hull is an unusual case among CPPs, as a CPP programme was initially funded there in 2013, but due to external circumstances was unable to continue. A whole new partnership proposal had to be developed and submitted and appraised, with a full staff team recruited with a fresh vision and approach. The project was unique in CPP history, being set up in 2017 during Hull UK City of Culture year. With support and agreement from all key stakeholder (Hull 2017, Hull Council, Arts Council England) the partnership was able to adopt and adapt Hull 2017's high profile Back to Ours Festival brand. This has offered the staff team both an opportunity and a challenge. Following the success of two large funding bids: CPP Phase 2 funding (running from Jan 2020 to Dec 2022), and NLCF funding for work specifically on Bransholme from 2019-2022, the next three years of delivery are secured.

With time needed for business planning and staff recruitment, the full CPP programme really only started in early 2018, but with a requirement that Phase 1 be completed by end December 2019. As a result, the programme, which was designed to run over three years, has only had two years in reality, and with a need to seek further funding early in 2019 meant that lessons and outcomes began to be being sought as the programme was just getting going. This report at the end of two years of delivery offers a clearer view of outcomes, but many of likely longer term changes will not have begun to appear yet. This requirement to sum up in evaluation, and to bid for continuation funding just as the programme started placed a strain on energy and resources and is also reflected in the amount of outcome data available from this phase and thus on the contents of this report.

### 1.3. Back to Ours Programme and Approach

Back to Ours is described (within the Phase 1 Business Plan) as:

...a transformational action research programme delivering outstanding cultural experiences with and for the people of Hull, targeting people and places of least arts engagement, but open and welcoming to all. Using Hull2017 as our launch pad, we will support local people to engage as audiences, participants, creators and commissioners, bringing the arts to life in homes, workplaces, libraries, public spaces, health and education settings. Working strategically with a strong infrastructure of partners and affiliates from arts, community, business and statutory sectors, and sharing the lessons learned, we will ensure sustainability to 2026 and beyond.

Working towards these aims, Back to Ours programme has combined 'the fun and the familiar' (professional Dolly Parton and Elvis Presley impersonators) alongside exceptional work by nationally and internationally significant artists (Black Grape, Casus and Lost in Translation) whilst supporting many of Hull's own artists to grow in skill and ambition. It has pro-actively tested alternative delivery formats including secret gigs and cabaret-style performances as well as offering a more contemporary take on traditional forms such as pantomime and circus.

<sup>1</sup> See Ruth Melville and Ben Morgan 2015 "Building Whilst Flying" (reference to the quote "It's like building a plane whilst flying it") and Mark Robinson's 'Faster but Slower' 2016

<sup>2</sup> See Mark Robinson's 'Faster but Slower' 2016 for outcomes, learning and experiences from CPP



During Phase 1 of Back to Ours, there were five strands of work: the Back to Ours Festival, the Commissions, the Hubs, Co-commissioned Festivals and Back to Ours Productions.<sup>3</sup>

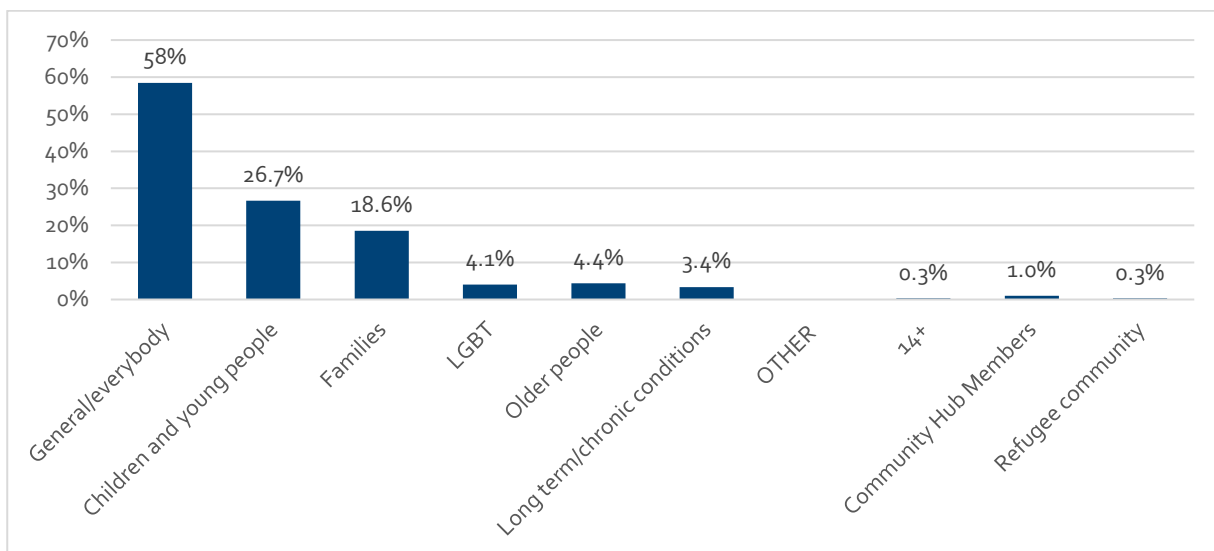
- There were **339,000 engagements** – **327,039 audience members** and **7,612 participants**
- In addition there was an estimated **1.38 million digital audience**.
- Back to Ours put on or supported **330 activities**, totalling **1320 hours of delivery**

These totals do not include all Hub meetings or attendances, or volunteer training events.

- There were a total of **6,438 volunteer hours** given, with a total estimated value of **£42,664**.
- A network of **11 non-traditional and alternative Festival venues** outside the city centre, have been developed and are now regularly used for arts programming including: William Gemmell Social Club, Wilberforce College, Freedom Centre, Willows Social Club, Northpoint Shopping Centre, Sirius Academy North, facilitating local participation and new approaches to programming for the city's arts sector.
- Four Hubs with around **90 local people as active Hub members** developed in Bransholme (Central & North); East Hull; North Hull and Orchard Park; and Derringham, all areas of high social deprivation and low arts engagement in the city.

The events were mainly targeted at a general audience, although around one quarter targeted Children and Young people and a fifth targeted Families. (see Fig 1 below)<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1: Target audience as percentage of total events (total 296 events)



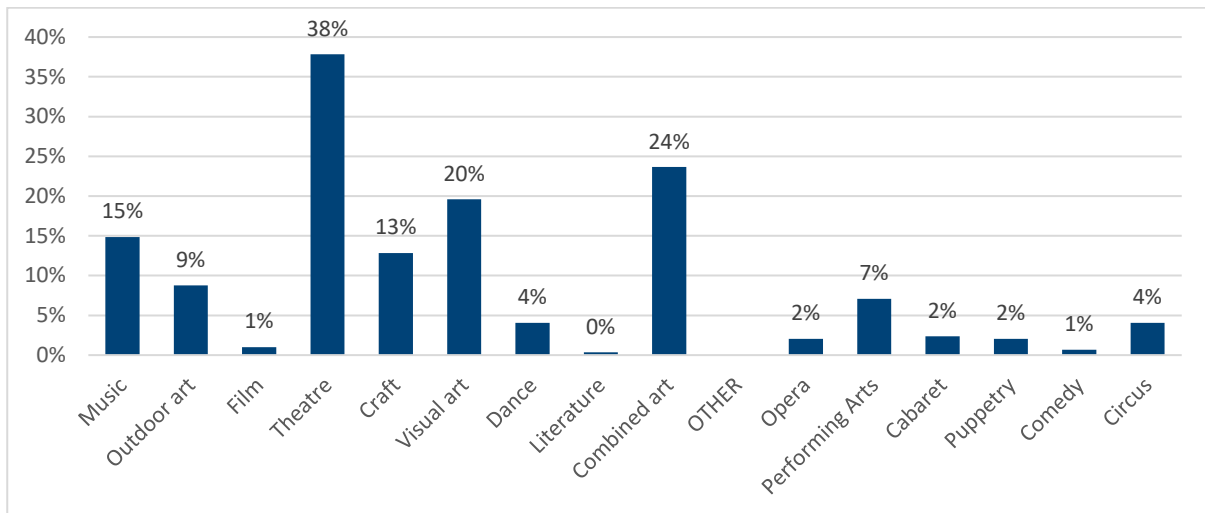
<sup>3</sup> For further information on Back to Ours programming and approach, see their website: <http://www.backtoours.co.uk/> or round up videos here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx71TeGPoNA>

<sup>4</sup> Note that each event can be categorised as up to 2 artforms, hence the figures adding to more than 100% as they are shown as a percentage of total events. For both charts, the columns after 'other' are a classified list of all the 'other' categories listed. We have not attempted to remove repeated artforms (e.g. 'theatre' and 'performance' may be for the same event).





Figure 2: Artform as a percentage of total events (total 296 events covered)



By far the most commonly programmed artform was theatre with nearly half of activities in this artform. Fig 2 shows that there were also a range of other artforms programmed, including visual arts and outdoor arts. About one third were classified (by the team) as 'other' (with an open classification option) and these are listed to the right of the chart and these may overlap with the main artforms but are shown for illustrative purposes.

For further information on Back to Ours Programme for Phase 1 see their website and round up videos here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx71TeGPoNA>

## 1.4. The Hull Context

Kingston upon Hull, or Hull for short, is a city of 260,000 people on the East Yorkshire coast. Founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it became a key English port and a centre for fishing. However, from the 1970's onwards, both these activities declined and so did the fortunes of Hull. This in turn brought complex socio-economic challenges and negative perceptions of the city. Since 1996 the city has been a unitary authority, governed by Hull City Council.

Described as "the most poetic city in England"<sup>5</sup>, culturally Hull has always had a strong profile, whether through its association with the poet Philip Larkin, the Hull Truck Theatre Company or its myriad high-profile sports clubs. The city has been home to artists as diverse as John Godber, Andrew Marvell and Throbbing Gristle. In 2017, it became the UK City of Culture, which saw £100 million of public sector investment in the city<sup>6</sup>.

### 1.4.1. Demographics

The population of Hull is 260,645<sup>7</sup> and has a slightly younger average age (35.6) than the UK as a whole (39.9). This is reflected in 25 to 29 year olds being the largest age group.<sup>8</sup>

According to 2011 census figures, the majority of the Hull population described themselves as White British (89.7% versus 79.8% nationally). The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population is 10.3% (versus 22.2%

<sup>5</sup> Peter Porter, quoted in a number of sources including <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/feb/14/hull-uk-city-of-culture-2017-rowan-moore>

<sup>6</sup> Hull University's Cultural Transformations: The Impacts Of Hull UK City Of Culture 2017, Preliminary Outcomes Evaluation, March 2018, p.26

<sup>7</sup> ONS Mid Year Estimates 2018 quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileid=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileid=22)

<sup>8</sup> 2018 population estimates based on 2011 Census quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileid=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileid=22)



nationally), with the largest single component White Other (4.4%).<sup>9</sup> Of the 35,000 residents born outside the UK, 21,000 (or 8.1%) of the Hull population came from inside the EU and 14,000 (5.4%) came from outside it.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.4.2. Health and welfare

Hull is the fourth most deprived local authority according to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>11</sup>. 53% of the areas in Hull fall within the most deprived 20% of areas nationally according to Public Health England's profile of the city<sup>12</sup>. The Council's Public Health Profile notes that "27% of dependent children in Hull were living in child poverty in 2017, compared with the England average of 17%"<sup>13</sup>, and there are also issues around the high levels of childhood obesity and the number of under 16's smoking.

When asked, 78% of residents said their health was very good or good (versus 81.4% nationally; 7.1% said their health as very bad or bad (versus 5.4% nationally)<sup>14</sup>. Almost 20% of the population identify as having a long term limiting illness – dividing almost equally between those limited a little and those limited a lot<sup>15</sup>. It is estimated that almost 19,000 people in the city are at risk of social isolation<sup>16</sup>.

### 1.4.3. Economy and employment

An estimated 8,000 businesses<sup>17</sup> in the city generate 125,000 jobs, of which 16.8% are in manufacturing, 14.4% in health and 12% in business administration and support<sup>18</sup>. Average pay, and the numbers of those with a Bransdegree, are lower than the national figures<sup>19</sup>. Unemployment in the city is around 7%<sup>20</sup>. Of those who are economically inactive, the largest groups are the permanently sick or disabled (10,400), full time students (10,100) or those looking after a home or family (9,900)<sup>21</sup>.

### 1.4.4. Arts engagement

Although the city has a strong heritage and a number of cultural destinations, traditionally arts engagement has been low. The Arts Council's Active Lives Survey 2015-18 shows that 55.4% of people in Hull had attended an arts event or spent time doing an arts activity in the last 12 months, compared with a national average for England of 60.3%<sup>22</sup>. For comparison, a town with "high arts engagement", Richmond Upon Thames had a figure of 79.9%.

<sup>9</sup> 2011 Census quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22)

<sup>10</sup> 2018 population estimates based on 2011 Census quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22)

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22)

<sup>12</sup> Hull Public Health Profile 2019: Hull City Council, p.3

<sup>13</sup> Hull Public Health Profiles 2017: Hull, Hull City Council, p.3

<sup>14</sup> 2011 Census quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22)

<sup>15</sup> 2011 Census quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22)

<sup>16</sup> Hull Public Health Profiles 2017: Hull, Hull City Council, p.3

<sup>17</sup> Hull University's Cultural Transformations: The Impacts Of Hull UK City Of Culture 2017, Preliminary Outcomes Evaluation, March 2018, p.24

<sup>18</sup> Annual population survey quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22)

<sup>19</sup> Hull University's Cultural Transformations: The Impacts Of Hull UK City Of Culture 2017, Preliminary Outcomes Evaluation, March 2018, p.24

<sup>20</sup> Hull University's Cultural Transformations: The Impacts Of Hull UK City Of Culture 2017, Preliminary Outcomes Evaluation, March 2018, p.24

<sup>21</sup> Annual Population Survey, quoted by Kingston upon Hull Data Observatory, [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/profiles/profile?profileId=22)

<sup>22</sup> Arts Council England's Active Lives Survey 2015-18, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/participating-and-attending/active-lives-survey#section-2>



## 2. Engaging and inspiring new audiences

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This section explores who attended Back to Ours events, with specific reference to Arts Council England's CPP National Research Question 1: Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?

We also consider the geographic spread of the audience, their previous arts engagement, and how well it represents the population of Hull<sup>23</sup>. With reference to this, we look at how Back to Ours is approaching the challenge of engaging and inspiring new audiences, with a view to assessing the likelihood of longer-term and sustainable impacts in these areas.

We find that:

- The 'reach' of the whole Back to Ours programme goes well beyond Hull, spreading both to the surrounding East Riding and nationally for many events
- Within Hull there is a good spread across the different areas, including the Community Hub and low engagement target areas of Derringham, Orchard Park, and Bransholme (45% of engagers came from HU5, 6 and 7 postcodes, 13% specifically from the Hub target areas)
- Back to Ours is reaching those less likely to engage in the arts: 45% of audiences said they'd not engaged in the arts in the last year. 90% came from medium or low engaging groups.
- Back to Ours is engaging people from lower socio-economic groups, in particular in terms of reaching areas of multiple deprivation where Hubs are operating, and appealing to people from socio-economic groups DE.
- BAME communities are engaging with the programme at levels proportionate to Hull's population according to 2011 census levels. This comparator figure, however, is likely to be out of date now given inward migration over the past 9 years and is lower than the business plan target of 15%. This will partly result from the areas targeted in Phase 1 which have tended to be mainly white in population. There is still more work to do in reaching and engaging with these communities and monitoring this reach.
- Back to Ours audiences love the shows, and they are very good at inspiring continued attendance with crossover audiences attracted by the Back to Ours brand and enthused by this to do more. Those who attend Back to Ours events are very likely to be inspired to engage further, and become regular audiences.
- Back to Ours has put in place a number of different approaches to engaging diverse communities and those least likely to engage in the arts. They are taking a thoughtful action learning approach to removing barriers in terms of marketing, communications, front of house, ticketing and cultural confidence, all of which are showing results in the audiences reached.

### 2.1. Where did Back to Ours attenders come from?

Under Creative People and Places, the focus for audiences needs to be the Hull area, and the Back to Ours business plan aimed that 75% of audiences would be from the Hull area.<sup>24</sup>

The analysis showed that Back to Ours events attracted audiences from across the UK, including from Scotland, South Wales and the far South West of England. Hotspots outside the region include Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham and London, where audiences will have access to a wider range of arts and cultural events and yet have been willing to travel to engage with the programme. Despite this wide reach, the majority of audiences

<sup>23</sup> Note of caution in all this data as it comes partly from booking data, which would privilege online bookers (and thus those likely to be more comfortable with engaging in the arts) and also affected by any bias in data collection. It is likely that those most comfortable in engaging with the arts will also be most comfortable with engaging with data collection at event – however sensitively handled. Despite all efforts, this will always be something to be borne in mind.

<sup>24</sup> Back to Ours Business Plan 2017-2020, p8





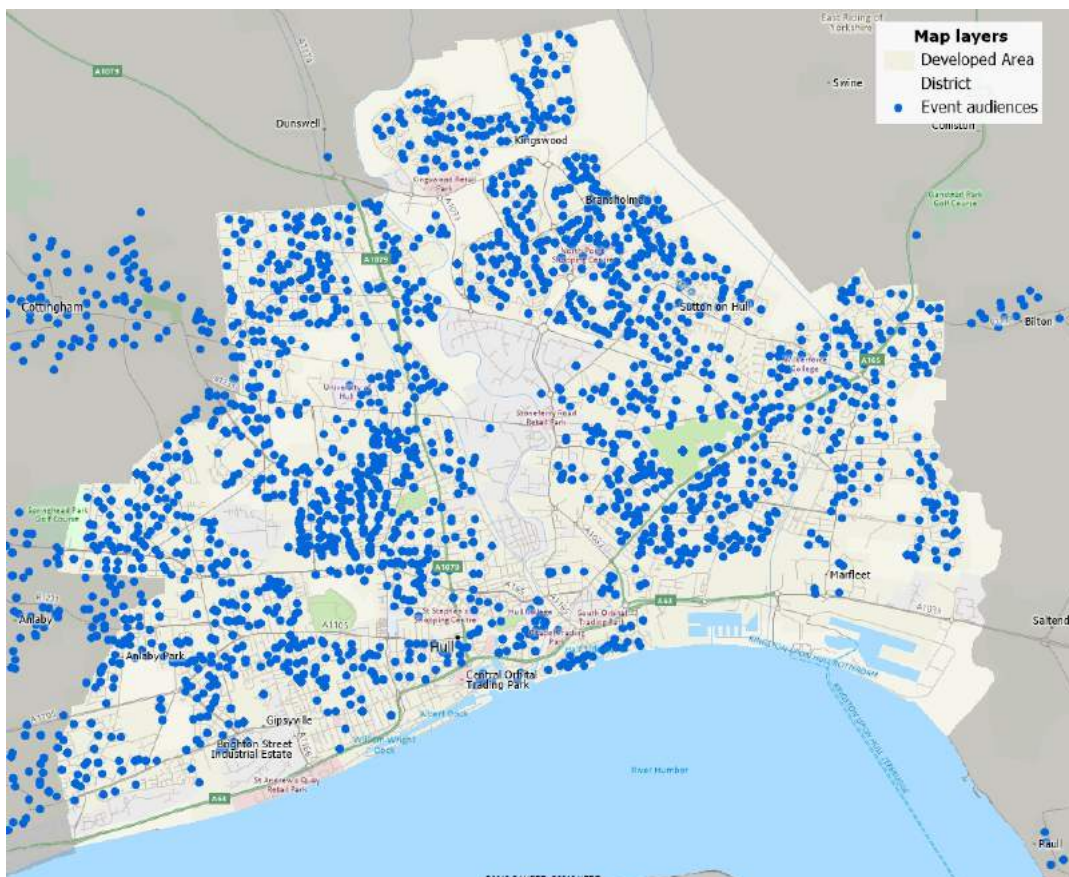
originated from closer to home, with 93% from Yorkshire and the Humber overall, and 56% from Hull City Council boundaries.

These figures are greatly affected by Pride and Freedom Festival figures – both BTO linked events (so in the dataset) with huge audiences, meaning their audiences drown out more locally focused events. Considering BTO Festival events – including Back to Bransholme – 72% of the audience came from Hull, 23% from the rest of East Yorkshire and the Humber region.

13% of Back to Ours audiences came from the areas targeted by the Community Hubs, this rose to 24% for BTO Festival audiences.

The map below, which shows where audiences for all Back to Ours events came from based on postcodes shared, shows the heavy focus on Hull itself, particularly the estates.

Figure 3: Map of attenders' postcodes for all Back to Ours events (the pale area shows the borders of the City of Hull)

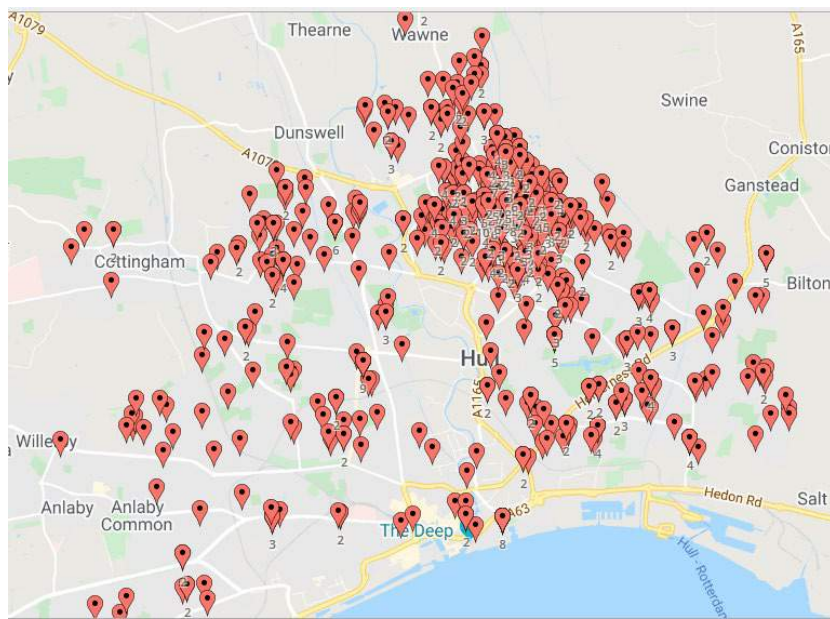


Audiences for different events show different distribution, reflecting the different approaches to marketing and reach. For example:

- The Pride and Freedom Festival audiences were widely distributed across the Hull and the wider region and into the UK as a whole;
- In contrast, the 2018 Pantomime data shows a very specific audience in the targeted areas (where the Hubs are located);
- The Back to Ours Festival mainly (but not exclusively) attracted people from the estates around Hull town centre (also targeted areas for the programme) 24% came from Hub areas, 72% from Hull as a whole.
- Back to Bransholme was hyperlocal by design and planning: although some people came from further afield, the targeting of the estate clearly paid off with 39% of audiences coming from Bransholme, and another 10% from the other Hub areas.

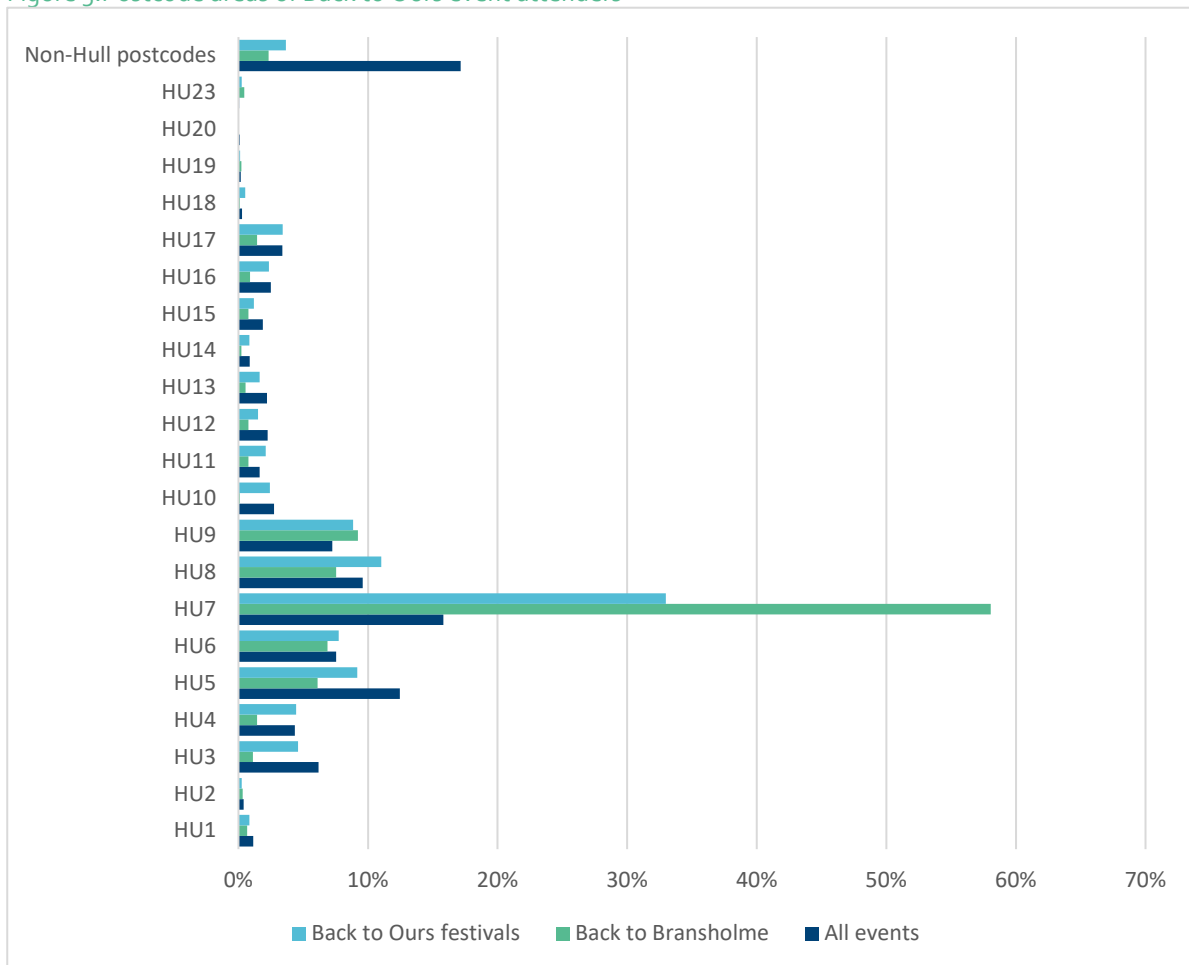


Figure 4:: Back to Bransholme Audience postcode map, showing concentration in the Bransholme area



Considering this split through postcode areas, the general 'cross -Hull' spread is partly a result of the inclusion in the full postcode list of attenders at both Pride and Freedom Festival, although the Back to Ours Festival has a wide reach across the city and beyond.

Figure 5: Postcode areas of Back to Ours event attenders





## 2.2. Were they new to the arts?

Attracting new audiences is the central aim of Creative People and Places and can be hard to measure. For Back to Ours audiences there are two specific issues with this approach:

One is that the 'baseline' for Back to Ours is being measured when public engagement in the arts in Hull is at a historic high (post- City of Culture). Hull 2017 claims involvement of 95% of the local population.<sup>25</sup> This means that all those who have the least interest in attending the arts, presumably took up this opportunity in 2017. If the Hull 2017 figures are to be believed, only 5% of the local population would be 'new to the arts' in terms of the usual CPP category, and it is possible these people might never be interested.

The second issue is how people self-define being new to the arts, and is shared by other CPPs. The question asked: "Have you been to an arts event in the last 12 months, e.g. a theatre, gallery, festival etc? Yes/No" appears clear. However, it is known from analysis of data in other CPPs that people's own definitions of 'art' varies, plus their memories may not be totally reliable.

In order to get the clearest view on this, and whether Back to Ours is reaching not just 'non-attenders' but also those who typically are least likely to engage in the arts, we measure this via two routes:

- Direct feedback from audiences at events through a question on the data postcard
- Analysis of audience postcodes, matched to Audience Spectrum segmentation, which uses consumption behaviour to map likelihood of people living in this postcode to engage in the arts.

There can be benefits and issues with both approaches – self reporting can overrepresent through positive bias (people feeling they should say they do attend the arts) and/or be unreliable due to memory. On the other hand, Audience Spectrum profiling only looks at the likelihood of people attending due to the consumer characteristics of where they live. Despite this, in previous research we have found strong alignment of these two indicators.

### 2.2.1. Self-defined

45% of Back to Ours audience said no, they hadn't been to an arts event in the last 12 months. This is lower than some CPPs but bearing in mind the effect of Hull 2017, including the claimed 95% penetration of the city's population by 2017 (arts/cultural) events, is still impressive. If we take people at their word, nearly half of the Back to Ours audience are from the 5% of the Hull population who didn't attend arts events in 2017.

We urge a note of caution here as the self-reporting relies on people's memory and definition. This typically means that people over and under report previous arts attendance.

This level did vary between events: for the Pantomime, 39% were new to the arts, for the Back to Ours festivals 27% say they hadn't been to the arts in the last 12 months. However, it is worth noting that nearly 100% of people who then stated what arts they'd been to mentioned a Back to Ours event. Although not first time attenders, literally, some of these were clearly repeat attenders to Back to Ours events, rather than necessarily being 'the usual suspects' (that is, those regularly attending arts events more generally).

What is interesting is the rise in 'not attended the arts in the last 12 months' between 2018 and 2019 data, rising substantially from 35% to 45%. This may be related to more local programming and targeting, but is also likely to relate to the reduction in other 'mass audience' events as 2017 recedes.

<sup>25</sup> CPPI Cultural Transformations, p69 "around 95% of residents experienced a cultural activity, event, installation or exhibition over the course of the UK City of Culture year"



## 2.2.2. Via audience segmentation

Audience Spectrum uses data from consumption patterns alongside box office and other arts data to estimate the likely arts engagement patterns of people in particular areas – to the lowest postcode level – and categorises them in 10 groups based on their likelihood to engage in the arts.

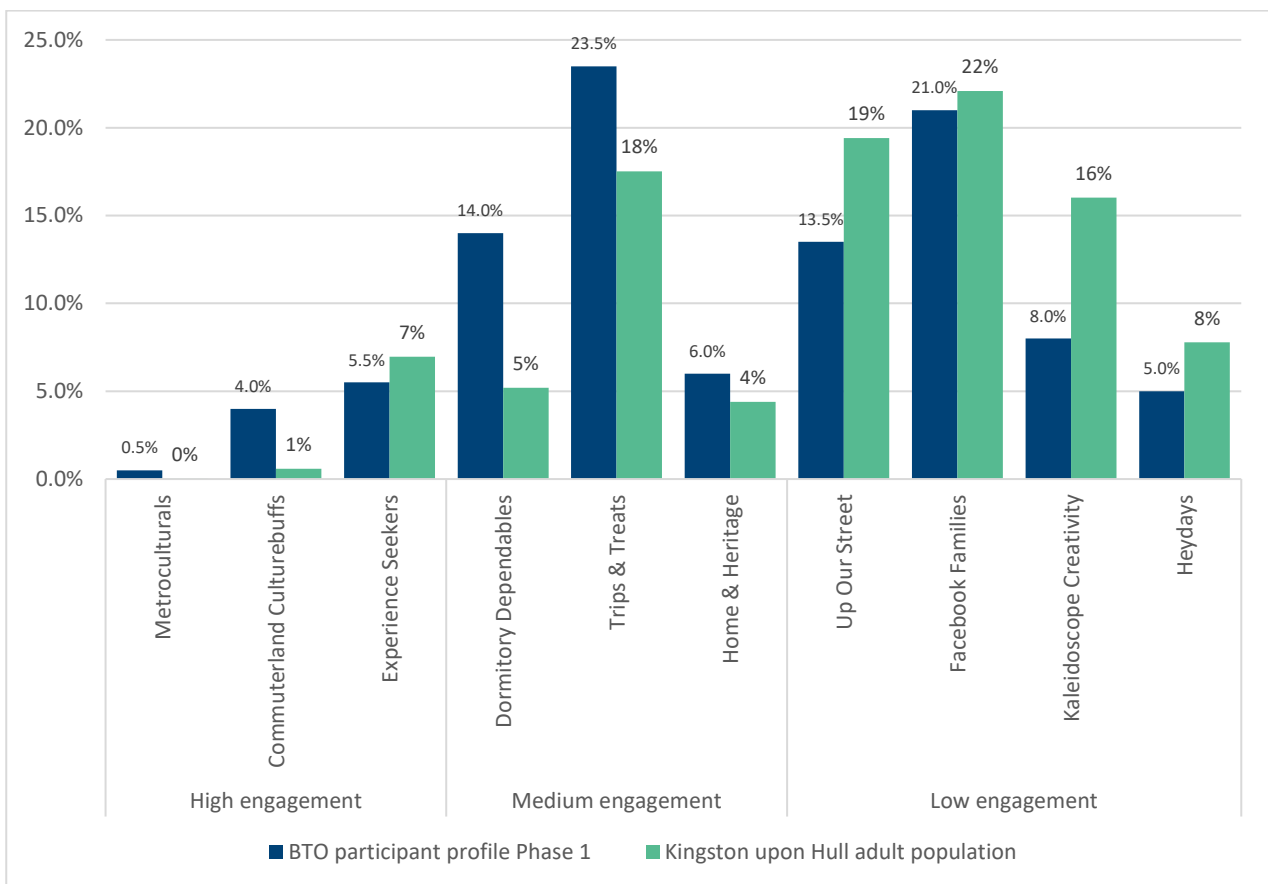
Figure 5 below shows the Back to Ours audience compared with the Hull population for these 10 groups. Left to right most to least likely to engage.

As an area of typically low engagement, with 55.4% of adults having engaged in the arts in the last 12 months<sup>26</sup>. There are very few people in the groups most likely to engage – ‘high engagers’ – either in the Hull population (8%) or in the Back to Ours audience (10%). This shows that Back to Ours isn’t just engaging those most likely to engage in the arts anyway.

In terms of other groups, Back to Ours is considerably more likely to engage those in the middle three groups (‘medium engagers’): nearly one half of the Back to Ours audience (48%), compared with just over a quarter (27%) of the Hull population.

The Back to Ours audience shows an underrepresentation of those least likely to engage, they are 47% of the Back to Ours audience, but 65% of the local population.

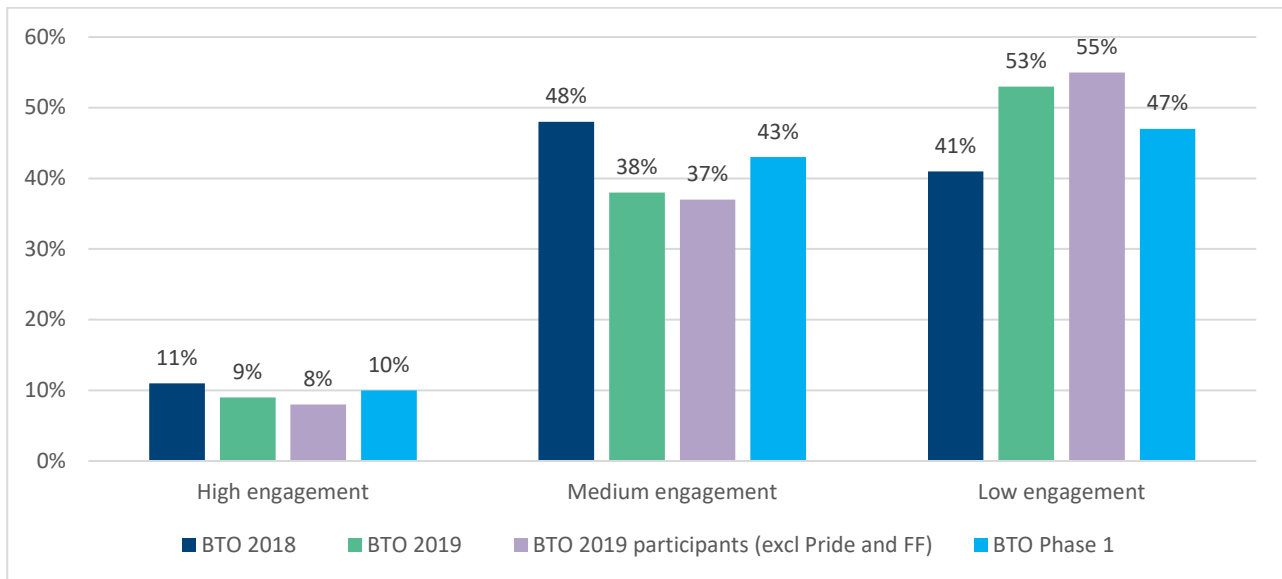
Figure 6: Audience Spectrum Profile for Back to Ours Phase 1



<sup>26</sup> NB, these are 2015-17 figures so likely pre-date 2017 effects and are a more useful baseline than the 95% attendance noted in the CPPI report. They also represent a change in the ‘ranking’ of Hull in terms of levels of arts engagement in England, indicating a likely underlying increase in arts engagement cross city.



Figure 7: Audience Spectrum 'engagement level' groups within the Back to Ours audience across Phase 1.



Overall, this shows that Back to Ours is doing well at ensuring it isn't just those most likely to engage in the arts who come to events. In particular, they are reaching Facebook Families (one of the two largest local groups among the low engagement group, and Trips and Treats among the medium engagers.

In addition, there was a shift between 2018 and 2019 of reach to lower engaging groups, compared to medium engaging groups – with a rise from 41% coming from those groups least likely to engage, to 53% of the 2019 audience coming from these groups.

Further analysis of the postcodes for 2019 partially explains the lower than hoped for numbers from the lowest engaging groups. We reran the data for core Back to Ours events only – excluding Pride and Freedom Festival – both of which are Back to Ours supported but with most programming and marketing running through other channels. This shows (lilac col in Fg 7 above) that in fact the core Back to Ours audience is 55% coming from areas least likely to engage in the arts – compared to 65% in the base population. It also shows that 92% of audiences come from the medium and lower engaging groups in 2019, which does match Hull's population.

There was also a shift over time within the programme as a whole, this came partly from the rise in percentage of Facebook Families in Back to Ours audiences from 2018 to 2019, with core Back to Ours audiences more than representing the Hull population in this group (24% of audiences, vs 22% of the population). There is room for more reach into the other main low engagement group in Hull – Up Our Street (13% of the audience vs 19% of the population), as well as the Kaleidoscope Creativity group, which is most under-represented among the low engaging groups within the Hull population (though it is 11% of the core audience in 2019 – a rise from 8% of the overall).<sup>27</sup>

The focus on promotion through Hubs, particularly through projects like the Living Room and Back to Bransholme project (i.e. explicitly engaging with communities least likely to engage with the arts) as well as the local box offices and door-to-door promotion in person are definite steps to reach these new audiences. These may well explain why there was an increase in the percentage of the audience coming from lowest engaging groups in 2019 compared with 2018.

<sup>27</sup> For further information on Audience Spectrum background and groups, as well as advice on how to target each, see <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-spectrum/profiles>





## 2.3. Which demographic groups?

Both Back to Ours, and CPP as a whole have the aim of reaching the population on a representative basis, and in particular reaching those groups who typically engage less in the arts. For Arts Council England (ACE), these groups include black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (BAME), people from lower socio-economic groups, who typically are massively underrepresented in ACE funded work. They also aim to represent across age ranges, gender and disability groups.

Monitoring of this data is compulsory for CPP programmes, but raises many issues of definition, and labelling of people when collecting this. Back to Ours does collect data on gender, ethnicity, age and disability. It has been agreed not to ask about socio-economic group, as this is both definitionally and ethically complex. Instead we use postcode analysis using IMD, SEG and Mosaic group as a proxy.

### 2.3.1. Socio-economic groups

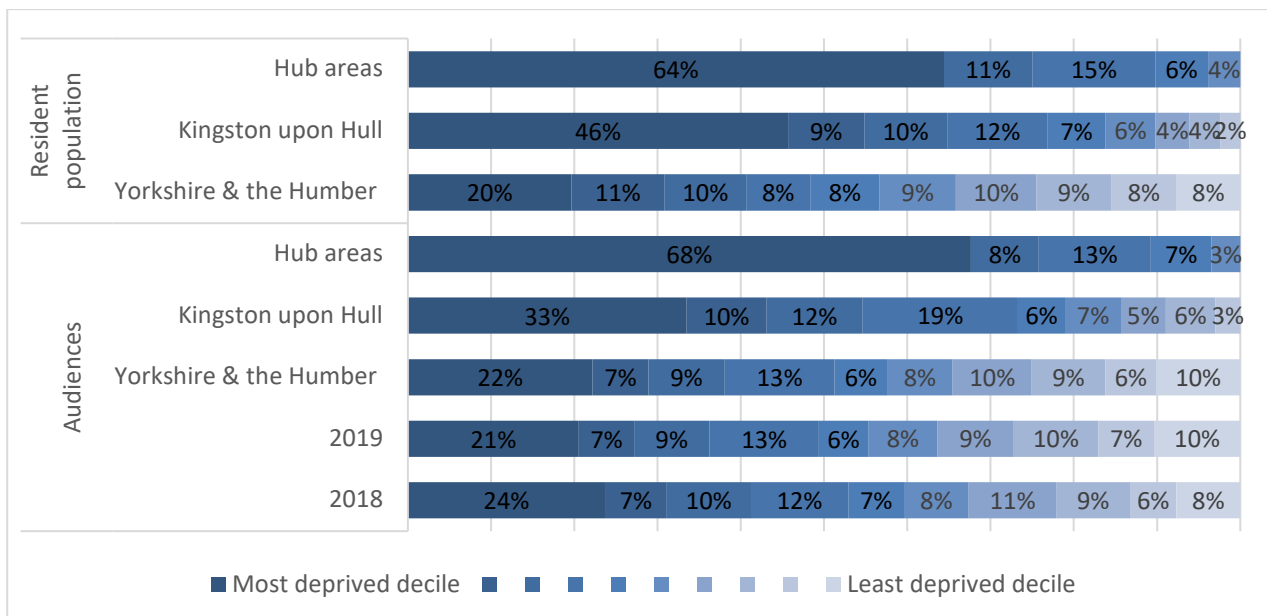
We have used postcodes to calculate two proxies for socio-economic groups:

- Levels of deprivation mapping postcodes against the English Indices of deprivation 2019 (IMD). The IMD provides a measure of a broad concept of deprivation, made up of several dimensions, including income, employment, education and health deprivation, barriers to housing and services, living environment and crime and
- SEG (social grade), based on employment of the main earner in the household.

#### Levels of Deprivation among Back to Ours audiences

The chart below compares the overall IMD decile ranking of audience neighbourhoods for those audiences from the neighbourhoods in which the Hubs operate, from Hull overall and from the Yorkshire & Humber region with those for the resident population in each area.

Figure 8: Overall IMD decile ranking comparisons



Despite the majority of the population in the Hub areas already being from neighbourhoods ranked as the most deprived in England, audiences from the Hubs areas are even more likely to be from the most deprived streets of these areas than the population within the Hub areas as a whole.

**That is, in the Hub areas, Back to Ours is reaching the poorest streets and neighbourhoods.**



In Hull as a whole this isn't the case, Back to Ours audiences are less likely to come from the most deprived areas of the city. For example, 46% of Hull's population lives in areas in the 10% most deprived in England, however only 33% of Back to Ours' Hull audience comes from areas in the 10% most deprived in England.

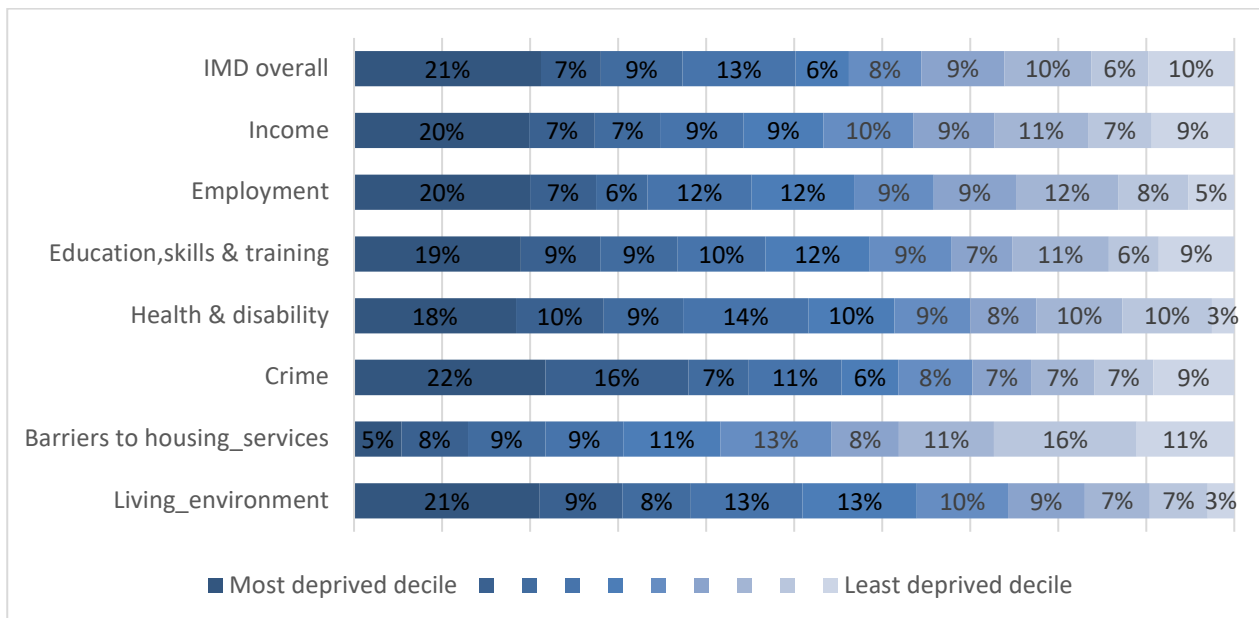
These results very much demonstrate the value of targeted activities in engaging deprived communities.

We know that audiences from these areas are likely to face a wide range of barriers to engaging with the arts, including poor health, education and poverty. We also know from the findings from national studies that people living in deprived areas are typically underrepresented amongst arts audiences and have been increasingly so in recent years.

It is also notable that whilst the programme has clearly been successful in engaging communities that are often under-represented amongst arts audiences, it has also attracted a good proportion of audiences from the most affluent areas in the region, who have clearly been willing to travel to attend events.

The chart below, shows the decile ranking of all audience neighbourhoods for the index overall (IMD) and for each of the seven sub-domains, showing that Back to Ours audiences are likely to face deprivation in all areas apart from barriers to housing (relating to Hull's good stock of housing association housing).

Figure 9: Area deprivation ranking for all audiences



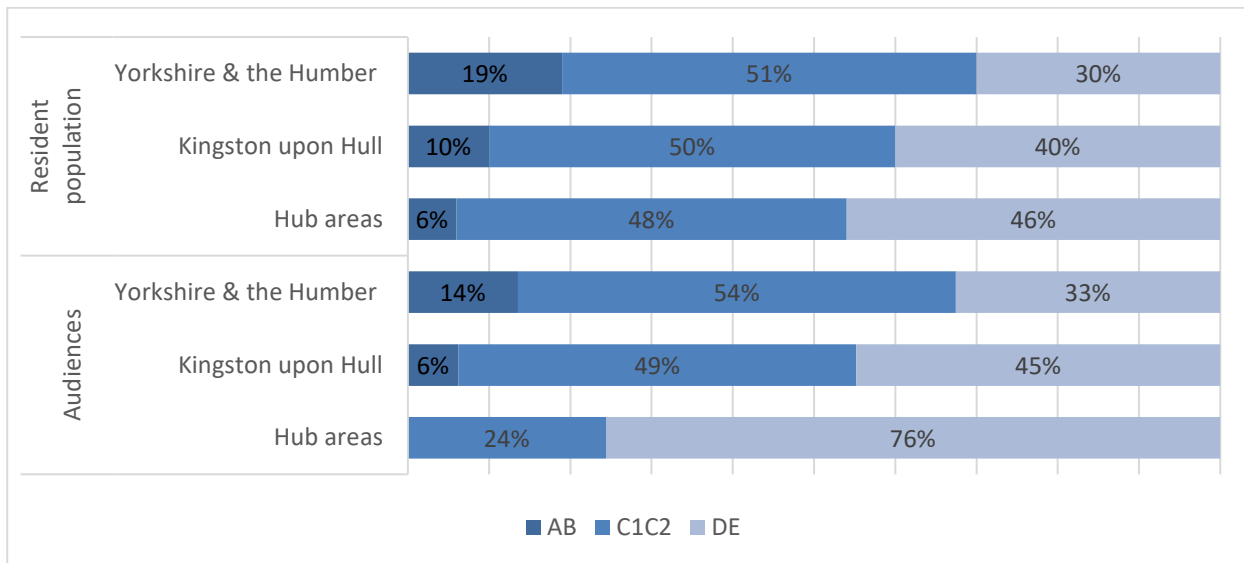
Overall 1 in 5 audiences were from neighbourhoods ranked amongst the most deprived decile nationally, with slightly more than this from neighbourhoods ranked as being most deprived by Crime and Living Environment.

### Socio-Economic Group of Back to Ours audiences

By mapping postcodes against output area statistics, we can derive an estimate of the audience socio-economic group (SEG) profile. Fig 10 below compares this for the programme overall for both audiences and resident populations just from the Hub areas, from Hull, and from the wider area.



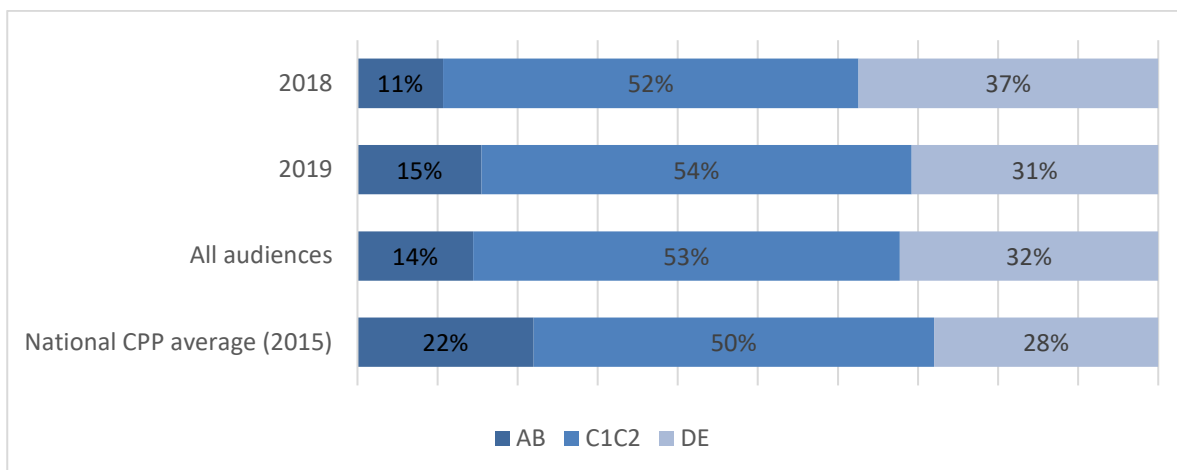
Figure 10: Audience SEG profile by area



The comparisons support those reported earlier and indicate that targeted activities within the Hub areas have been particularly successful in reaching and engaging audiences from SEG groups DE. Accounting for 3 in 4 audiences from these areas, they are significantly over-represented. Also notable, albeit not as great, is the over-representation of audiences from SEG groups DE<sup>28</sup> amongst Hull overall and from the wider Yorkshire and the Humber region. Almost half (45%) of all audiences from Hull and third of those from the region were from these typically under-represented groups.

This chart compares the approximated<sup>29</sup> socio-economic group (SEG) profile of all Back to Ours programme audiences each year with those reported for CPP projects overall. It shows that overall almost a third (32%) of all audiences were from the least affluent groups (DE, typically representing people in manual, lowest grade occupations or unemployed). In 2018, the proportion was even higher at 37% of all audiences, which again is in part the result of a greater representation of local communities amongst audiences compared to 2019.

Figure 11: Audience SEG profile by year



<sup>28</sup> Socio-economic groups DE are defined as Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and non-working, casual and lowest grade workers. [https://www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/1285\\_MediaCT\\_thoughtpiece\\_Social\\_Grade\\_July09\\_V3\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/1285_MediaCT_thoughtpiece_Social_Grade_July09_V3_WEB.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Approximates drawn from the predominant SEG group within the output areas within which each audience postcode centroid lies.

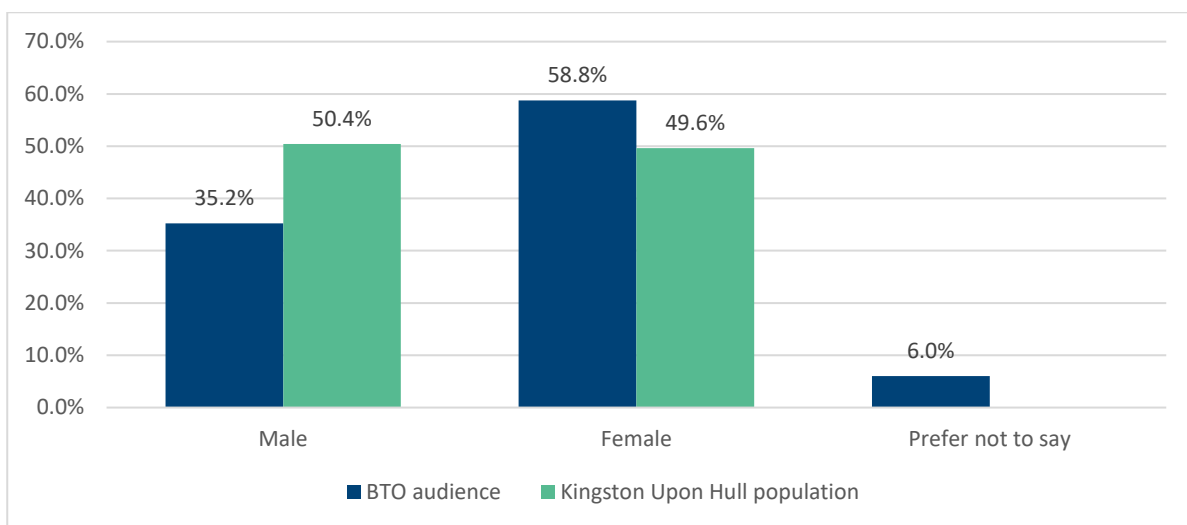


Notwithstanding the difference between years, the results are particularly notable given the tendency for audiences from SEG groups DE to be under-represented amongst arts audiences and when we consider the reported national average for CPP projects at 28%<sup>30</sup>.

### 2.3.2. Gender

Although the breakdown of gender within the Back to Ours audience doesn't match the local population (which is in fact slightly skewed towards males), women tend to be more likely both to book the tickets (thus affecting gender data collection at ticket sale point) and also are more likely to agree to be surveyed. As a result, the gender split may represent data collection errors rather than actual audience profiles. Interestingly, there was a shift in gender make up between 2018 and 2019, with the percentage of men rising substantially from 29% in 2018 to 38% in 2019.

Figure 12: Gender breakdown of Back to Ours participants compared with Hull population



The Back to Ours team has made a specific and concrete attempt to reach more men, in particular through programming through working mens clubs and other local social clubs, both of which would have a disproportionately high male audience compared to any other arts setting.

### 2.3.3. Age groups

In terms of age, the Back to Ours audience more or less matches the Hull population apart from under 16s (which may well be down to lack of recording as under 16s aren't surveyed) and over 65s, who tend to engage less in all activities.

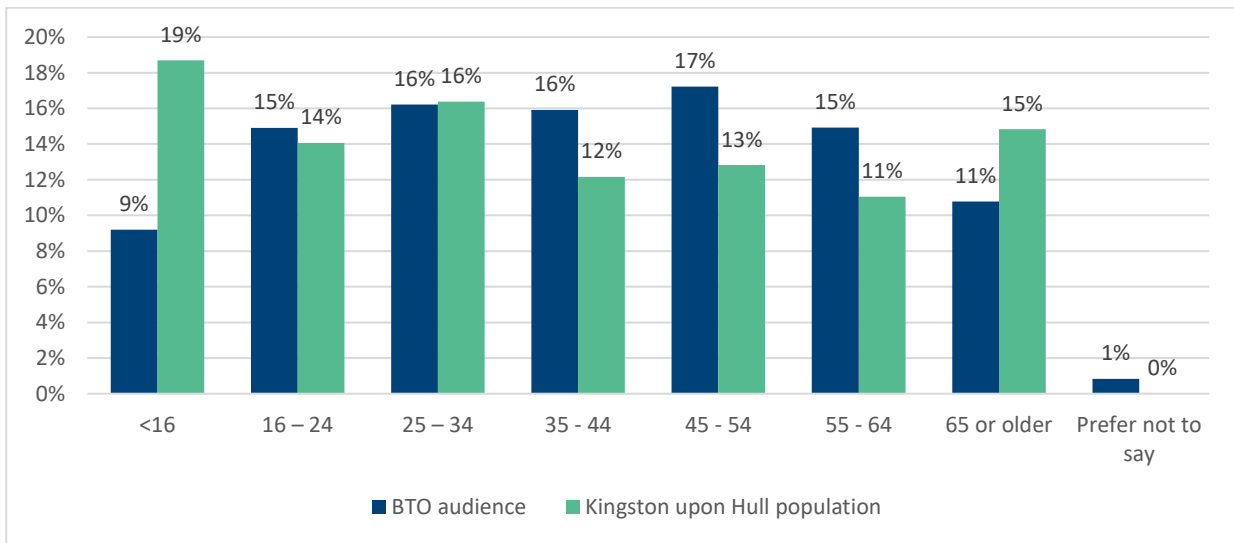
Despite this, there are a reasonable proportion of the audience aged over 65 (over 10%) and this may reflect the fact that the over 65 age group is featured strongly in the imagery of Back to Ours – for example, older people are pictured 'on the bus' in the "hero" image. Many of the shows would be just as likely to attract older people as anyone else - either as locals, members of social clubs and churches, or grandparents etc. As people tend to be more happy to speak to those similar to themselves, and many of the volunteers doing data collection would have been in this older age range, this is unlikely to be a sampling issue.

Although moving in a positive direction, there is clearly opportunity for older age groups to be targeted even more, given that 15% of Hull's population is over 65 and this is likely to rise in future years.

<sup>30</sup> Creative People and Places Profiling and Mapping Year 2 National Report, The Audience Agency



Figure 13: Age breakdown of Back to Ours participants compared with Hull population

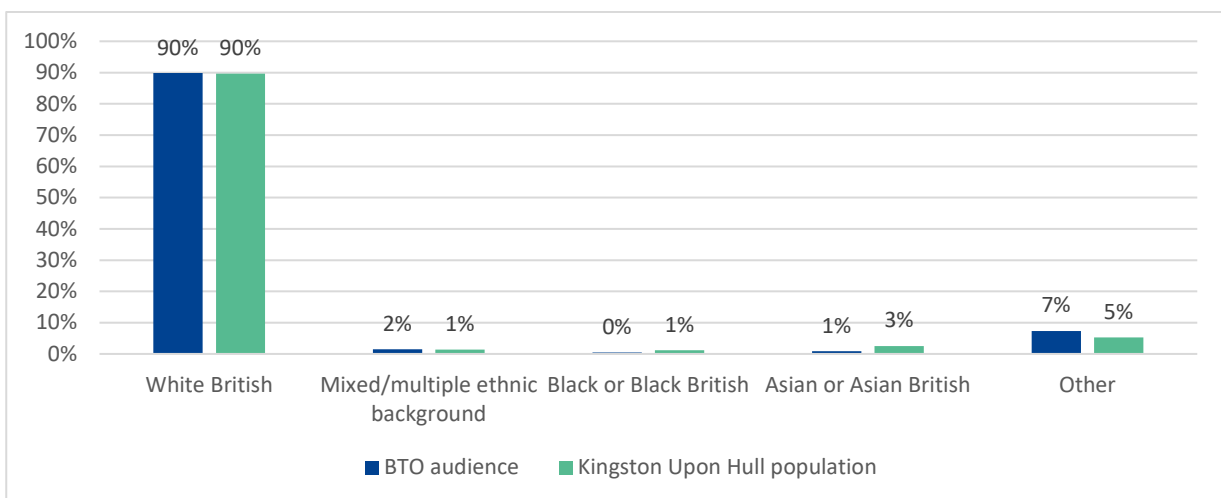


### 2.3.4. Ethnicity

Hull had a mainly 'White British' audience in 2011 when the census population data was last updated. 'White other' (excluding British, Irish and Traveller) which would be mainly Europeans made up 4.1% of the Hull population in 2011. However it is widely recognised that there has been an increase in the population of new migrants from Eastern Europe and the Baltic States in this period, and figures from Back to Ours' Audience Development plan cite the BAME percentage at 15% (4% are from Eastern European, 2% are of African origin, 8% are of Middle Eastern or Asian origin).<sup>31</sup> The target within the original audience development plan for Back to Ours CPP is that 15% of attenders should self-define as BAME.

There will be a bias in data collection here as non-English speakers are less likely to fill in a form (although Back to Ours are taking steps to change this), so there will be an undercount. According to our data (as above, based on UK Census figures from 2011), the BAME population of Hull is around 10%. This exactly matches Back to Ours' audiences. However, Back to Ours does have a way to go to reach their target of 15% with currently around 10% of audiences self-defining as BAME.

Figure 14: Ethnicity of Back to Ours participants compared with Hull population



<sup>31</sup> Back to Ours Audience Development Plan p7 – source not given – as a result we have used the 2011 census data as a comparator as it matches the groups within the Back to Ours data collection.

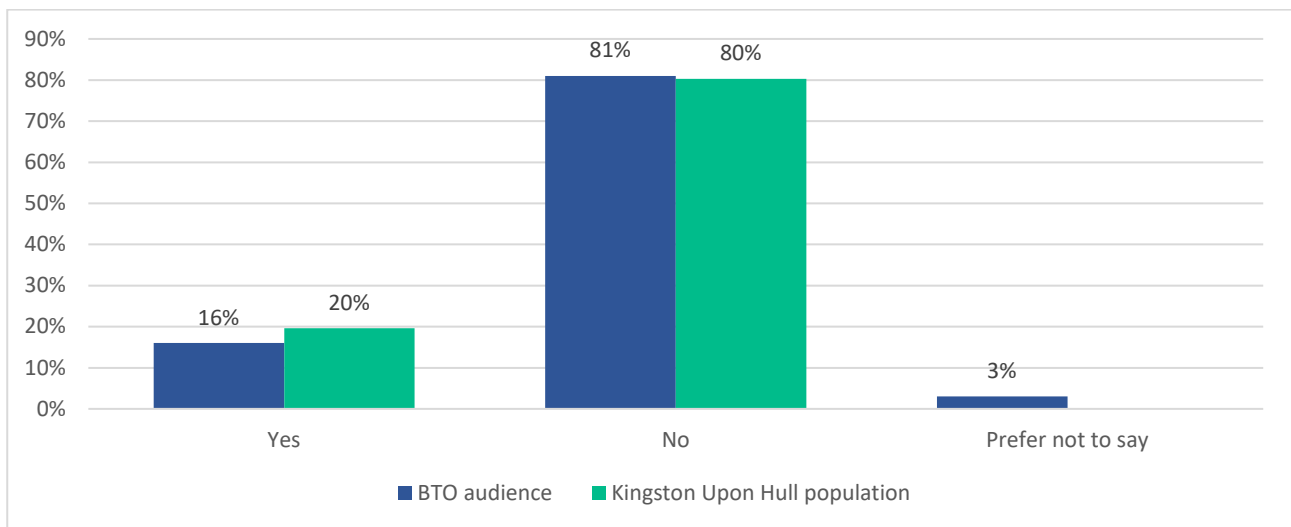




In addition to any consideration of how to define Hull's BAME population size, it should be noted that this target of 15% BAME will be a challenge to meet when set against the fact that Back to Ours has chosen to target a series of estates around Hull, most of which tend to be predominantly white. This is an excellent aim in terms of reaching those who don't tend to engage in the arts, and people from lower socio-economic groups, but it does mean that the (often more centrally located) BAME population of Hull may continue to be relatively under represented. The new business plan, including work in some of the more ethnically mixed areas of the city is likely to help overcome this issue, but effort needs to be given to recording ethnicity of audiences at events so as to fully record reach into these communities.

## 2.3.5. Disability

Figure 15: Disability breakdown of Back to Ours participants compared with Hull population



16% of Back to Ours audiences identified as disabled. This is very similar to the local population and given the higher proportions of disabled people among older groups (as noted above) and the likelihood that those with disabilities might include the seriously ill (who could be expected not to want to/be able to attend events), this is a good reach.

Back to Ours is putting considerable thought into d/Deaf<sup>32</sup> access by working closely with a BSL (British Sign Language) interpreter on many shows, not simply having her there on the day, but working with her to ensure that thought is given to d/Deaf access within the whole of programming of the Festivals.

The staff and volunteers are recognised as very supportive of access around neurodiversity and learning disability. Several people specifically commented to the Chat to Ours research team about how well Back to Ours support access, giving clear information about any issues that might arise (e.g. loud noises, lights, needs for movement and access). One woman felt that they had made it possible for her daughter to access shows she would never normally be able to attend. Subtle but essential accommodations to support children who were struggling with situations due to access issues were noted by researchers on several occasions and this is an approach which Back to Ours is building on further. The experience and level of use of access features at [Back to Bransholme](#) is an example of the use and success of this.

<sup>32</sup> Defined as deaf (sign language users) and deaf (who are hard of hearing but who have English as their first language and may lipread and/or use hearing aids).



## 2.4. Comparison with Business Plan Objectives

The 2017-2019 Business Plan for Hull CPP sets out a series of audience targets. All CPPs need to evolve their work to fit the context of the time, the skills and approach of the programmers and most importantly experience and reflection arising from the action learning around what works. As a result we haven't forefronted these figures but include for reference.

Business Plan Audience Objectives	Back to Ours reach in Phase 1
<b>150,000 engagements across Phase (inc online)</b>	339,000 engagements (plus 1.38m more online)
<b>75% of audiences from Hull</b>	72% of Back to Ours Festival Audiences from Hull, 56% of audiences overall from Hull
<b>50% of audiences from areas of medium or low engagement</b>	90% of audiences from areas of medium or low engagement
<b>15% of audiences self-defined as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)</b>	10% self-defined as BAME

## 2.5. Were they inspired to engage further?

Can't wait 'til the next one...

*Volunteer cast member from Back to Bransholme, survey*

"...to be able to see such high quality theatre and music events within walking distance of my house is fantastic!!"

*Audience member, February 2019 Festival*

"Really enjoyed and already recommended"

*Audience member, February 2019 Festival*

"I love the eclectic mix, so I'd just like to see it kept going."

*Audience member, February 2019 Festival*

...I would like there to be more events as the public love the things we've done so far I've really enjoyed being a hub member for the past year and I'm looking forward to being involved in more events in the future....

*Hub Member, survey*

Audiences clearly love the Back to Ours events, there is a huge amount of clearly recorded qualitative feedback showing this, and the level of agreement with 'I would recommend this to family and friends' remains in the high 90 percents for all shows.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Audience members can score between 0 and 10 for this question, the average score is between 9.3 and 9.8 for all events.

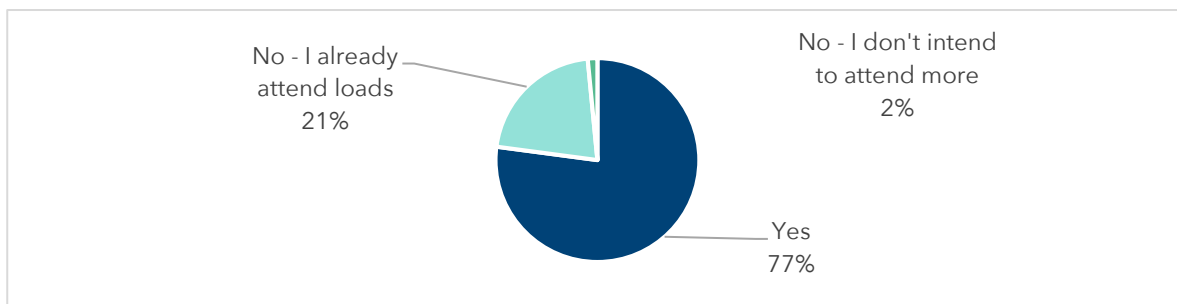


Chat to Ours volunteer researchers reported numerous examples of comments and physical responses showing the audience's enthusiasm and confidence in engaging with Back to Ours. The audience is increasingly comfortable coming into the venues and feel able to ask for further information where needed. At the end of shows, audience members would ask about when the next one was and would be happy to take flyers for shows elsewhere in Hull when handed out.

Pantomime attenders were asked if they'd attended any arts events in the last 12 months and if so what. Of those that gave an answer, 40% explicitly mentioned a Back to Ours event in some way (many more said 'theatre' which could well be a Back to Ours Festival event). In many cases these were the only answers given. This demonstrates that Back to Ours is inspiring people to return to their events, which can be built into a wider confidence to engage with arts more generally. In fact, emerging data from early 2019 shows that nearly everyone who attended a show said they would come to Back to Ours again (only 2 said 'maybe' and none said 'no' from over 100 answers).

Audience members were asked were they likely to attend more arts events as a result of attending the Festival, a significant minority feel they already attend loads (and therefore literally couldn't attend more) but 77% said they would be likely to attend arts events in future as a result of attending Back to Ours, and this is certainly backed up by Chat to Ours observations of people regularly coming back to shows, bringing additional friends and family, and then becoming 'regulars'.

Figure 16: Has attending the Festival event made you more likely to attend arts events in future?



This figure of 77% compares very favourably with the Hull 2017 figure given of 51% of audiences who said they were likely or very likely to attend more as a result of 2017.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.6. Back to Ours' approach to reaching new audiences

Back to Ours has from the start placed a lot of focus on reaching new audiences, including those less likely to engage in the arts. They have taken an action learning approach, testing out new ideas very flexibly and creatively, although reflection hasn't been logged formally. A piece of work is currently in process to pull together the learning on approaches to ticketing to share more widely.

We can think about Back to Ours reaching to non-arts engagers in three ways: Marketing, Ticketing and Welcome.

### 2.6.1. Marketing

Back to Ours sought to use appropriate channels to reach their audience(s) and let them know a show was on. The marketing has evolved from bold statements - a branded ice cream van giving out ice creams at the launch event - to much more 'hyperlocal' communication around shows. After issues with previously used distribution companies emerged, and through reflections that city centre programme launches weren't driving ticket sales, for 2019 Festivals and show there was an investment in taking a more personable and local approach with team

<sup>34</sup> From CPPI (2018) Cultural Transformations p84: "Residents were also asked whether they were likely to continue to attend arts and cultural activities in Hull and the East Riding. Overall, 51% indicated they were likely or very likely to do so" Note that this data is not directly comparable as it was asked of all residents (albeit 95% of whom had in some way engaged with 2017) whereas our data comes from audiences only.



members and members of the local Hubs going out into the target neighbourhoods to directly deliver print marketing and more importantly take time to chat with people.

As with other CPPs, word of mouth and “the internet” have been the key. Word of mouth has been about families, friends and volunteers letting people know a show was on or recommending something. For example, the Chat to Ours team noted that children had told parents or grandparents about a show and asked to go along. This has been made increasingly more effective as the Hubs develop and become a core part of the local marketing approach.

Though there is no specific data from “the internet”, Facebook, “mum’s groups” and the Eastriding Mumbler (a local parenting website) are all mentioned to Chat to Ours as ways people heard about shows. However, the team feel that social media tends to bring those who already attending arts events, so while they use these routes, they aren’t emphasised. The exceptions to these are the (closed) facebook group for Hub members – which is used extensively to communicate direct with Hub members around activities and plans, and the use of hyper-local facebook groups such as the North Point Shopping Centre group to promote Back to Bransholme, taking place at the centre itself.

The brochure has been found to be a useful tool to promote shows. Some parents saw it because children bought it home in a school bag. Also, it was used by volunteers to “cross-sell” other shows – a brochure was handed out when someone came to a show without knowing it was part of a wider Festival or that other shows were on. The brochure has also been translated to better reach Hull’s Polish community (see case study below).

The team has given a lot of thought to the print – and specifically the brochure for Festivals, with a fear that if print is too professional looking it could be off putting to audiences. The hub members have been approached for feedback and have made suggestions around the copy used in print marketing previously, which has helped the staff adapt this for future Festivals. It is still recognised that there is work to be done to find the middle ground of marketing that is attractive but not overly corporate and off-putting.

There is also specific thought given to language used within the brochure and other marketing. For example, when promoting Casus’ 2019 show DNA, the Back to Ours Director rewrote the copy describing the show, to make it feel more accessible and welcoming to audience who wouldn’t usually attend international quality circus art. This approach was valued by the artists, and is increasingly being recognised as a valuable skill by other cultural organisations who draw on the back to Ours expertise in this area.

Other more quirky activities have also had impact. Dolly In ASDA<sup>35</sup> “went viral” on Facebook attracting thousands of views and shares, and one audience member knew about a show from seeing illuminated signs at the side of the road.

However, the team still feel there are improvements they could make. Lack of time has been a pressure which has prevented marketing learnings being fully implemented meaning that the team can at times operate in a very reactive way without space to think more strategically. Staff felt there is still more potential to bring together Back to Ours marketing and community engagement activities and plans are underway to make this more joined up. Whilst externally, the view is positive and feedback suggests that people had heard of Back to Ours and the Festivals in particular, the team still have an ambition to make more space to reflect and learn from what they have tried in the past and are programming in research and reflection accordingly.

## 2.6.2. Ticketing

Ticket prices were extremely competitive, and the pricing structure kept simple to avoid any barrier to attendance. Thus, tickets were £3, £5, or adults coming free to the shows for children. In general, the reaction to the pricing noted by Chat to Ours was positive – “brilliant and proper value for money”. Although, a few people before seeing the show said that they had thought the ticket price might be low to reflect the quality itself.

Staff felt they are aware of some partial learnings in this area which have yet to be fully implemented. For example, the team feel they now understand that selling at the venues where shows are going to take place

<sup>35</sup> Video of a Dolly Parton impersonator performing in the local ASDA superstore



enables them to reach the local community members, compared to online ticket sales which tend to be purchased by audiences from across the city who are already engaged in the arts. However, for the February 2019 Festival, the decision was taken to sell tickets at libraries across the city. Ticket sales through the libraries (at the time of interviews) had been disappointingly low. Upon reflection some staff felt that this should have been foreseeable as the libraries are not venues that have been used by Back to Ours before.

Experiments have been tried with selling tickets in libraries, through Hull Truck and online to make the process easier. One of the things that worked was selling tickets at the venues where shows are going to take place. This enabled them to reach the local community members, compared to online ticket sales which tend to be purchased by audiences from across the city who are already engaged in the arts. However, ticketing has proved a challenge; for example, there were initial issues with ticketing systems. Also, tickets for some music gigs – for example Shed Seven - were bought by fans from around the country, meaning that local people may have missed out, leading the team to have to look at models which ringfence tickets for local people.

All of these have produced important learning for Back to Ours, and for CPPs and other similar projects nationally, as reaching new audiences while running a complex ticketing system is something which hasn't been fully achieved anywhere.

### 2.6.3. Welcome

There was a conscious effort to make venues welcoming and to reflect the friendly, informal nature of Back to Ours and put (new) audiences at ease. This has taken a number of forms:

- Extensive training given to volunteers who greet people at the doors, meaning that they know they are welcome and help overcome any access issues that arise
- Well set out waiting areas with Snack to Ours (the refreshments team) and leaflets and brochures for other shows, so waiting is not an uncomfortable experience.
- Pre-show engagement either with something related to a show, (e.g. Monkey at Jungle Book, Le Chef at Giant Jam Sandwich) or a more general entertainer or a 'children's corner' style offer.
- Photo opportunities (e.g. with the cast at Jungle Book in Oct 2018).
- Consideration of the needs of those with mobility, sensory, neurodiversity and other issues.

Chat to Ours have commented on this extensively as a factor in 'what works', and audience feedback shows it is valued:

*A really lovely greeting from staff in 'role' as we entered.*

*Back to Bransholme Audience Member, Survey answer to 'what was the best thing?'*

*... The event staff friendliness and signer for the deaf*

*Audience member, Survey answer to 'what was the best thing?'*





### 3. High quality art delivered where it matters

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This section explores the quality of the art and the process of engagement within Back to Ours. This addresses National Research Question 2: To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?

In order to do this, in line with best practice, we take a 360 degree approach considering the audience and participant experience and outcomes, the artist and producer intentions, as well as beginning to draw in peer review and commentary.

Previous work<sup>36</sup> has found that it is as important to consider the 'intention' – that is the inputs to excellence as well as the outcomes, so we explore these alongside the experiences and retrospective views of artists, audiences and participants. We look at the issue around a number of areas to match Back to Ours' programme and aims: the audience experience particularly at Festivals, the quality of the process of engagement through the inclusion of community voice in programming and supporting the capacity of the local sector to gain ambition and skills particularly in programming to a wider range of audiences.

We find that:

- There is a commitment to excellence of process and product which forms the backbone of all Back to Ours programming.
- This is particularly ensured through the internal challenge, and space for external challenge which the team build in, meaning that Back to Ours is truly embedding an action learning philosophy into understanding and ensuring quality.
- The artistic vision includes: Challenging, excellent and resonant work; Co-developed and produced with local people and participants; Located in everyday places; and great fun to be part of.
- Audience and participants are captivated and enthused by the work and see it as high quality.
- Partnering with arts organisations like Casus and Cluster Arts supports audiences across the city to engage with international quality work.
- The challenge for Phase 2 in terms of assessing excellence needs to move from feeling the need to justify it as high quality work, to exploring what impact the quality itself has on participants and audiences.
- Back to Ours is clearly committed to a genuine and empowering approach to engagement. Community voice in the programme is ensured through the mechanism of the Hubs – resident focused groups operating in the target estates – and the approach of involving them in an informal and accessible conversation about the programme. This has developed into a distinctive and genuine collaboration, however the level of time and skill needed to achieve this should be recognised and shared.
- Through the commissions, Back to Ours has developed the capacity of the local sector in terms of partnership working with local communities and offering a space for them to explore more ambitious projects than previous funding has allowed. There is clearly a need for more support to develop local artists so they can deliver work locally and engage further with Hull communities. Back to Ours can play a partial role in this, through the Hubs commissioning process, but the responsibility cannot rest with them alone and this should be delivered in partnership with the rest of the cultural sector.

<sup>36</sup> See for example, Taking Bearings (<http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/taking-bearings>), Transported CPP Phase 1 Evaluation (<http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/transported-final-evaluation-phase-1>), What It Does To You: Excellence in CPP (<http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/what-it-does-you-excellence-cpp>)



## 3.1. A quality experience for participants and audiences

Using the ACE quality metrics<sup>37</sup> as a base, we have explored the programming intentions, and outcomes for the Festival. This work shows that the intention, ambition and increasingly outcome are of high quality in terms of process and product.

The ACE quality metrics cover both the process of the work, and the art produced, asking was there quality and what was the experience like. They are:

For audience, artist (self) and peer reviewer

- Concept: it was an interesting idea
- Presentation: it was well produced and presented
- Distinctiveness: it was different from things I've experienced before
- Challenge: it was thought-provoking
- Captivation: it was absorbing and held my attention
- Enthusiasm: I would come to something like this again
- Local impact: it is important that it's happening here
- Relevance: it has something to say about the world in which we live
- Rigour: it was well thought through and put together

Self and peer only:

- Originality: it was ground-breaking
- Risk: the artists/curators really challenged themselves
- Excellence: it is one of the best examples of its type that I have seen

### 3.1.1. Audiences' responses

Audience responses to Back to Ours events are overwhelmingly positive. Using what has been found to be a useful signifier of positive experience in a single question – a leading indicator for future engagement – we ask audiences: “would you recommend this event to friends and family” with a 1-10 scale. The answers are extremely positive, with some events gaining 10s from every single audience member who replies.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, when asked about how far they'd travel for an event, around 80% are clear they would travel anywhere in Hull to see a Back to Ours event – which is borne out by the high turnouts in some of the 'far corners' of the city such as the Bransholme estate for Back to Bransholme.

This links to quality metrics: 'enthusiasm' – I would come to something like this again.

Looking at the open replies to the questions around what did you like or not like, the negatives are far fewer (with many saying 'nothing') and also relate to more operational matters: weather, venue location, confusion over tickets etc, pointing to there not being any issue with the content of the work.

The answers around what they liked best tend to generate a lot of responses like “all of it”. People liked the specific nature of the shows – during the DNA event, people mentioned 'circus aspects', for Back to Bransholme they liked the local specificity of the work and the history tie in.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/quality-metrics/quality-metrics>

<sup>38</sup> Audience members can score between 0 and 10 for this question, the average score is between 9.3 and 9.8 for all events.



I liked that all performers were so different and individual; I liked different emotions/moods of each section and fantastic artists/athletes.

*Audience member, Survey*

Just moved here. Totally took us by surprise. Eccentric and immersive. Seriously professional. And it's only £3!

*Audience member, Survey*

Well organised, good stewarding, comfortable venue with good visibility and the act itself was amazing!

Chat to Ours data, observing and chatting with the audiences at Back to Ours Festivals and other events shows a wealth of evidence of the impression made on audiences of the events, their observations are full of notes about the level of immersion in the performance, particularly for the children.

"It was nice watching the reactions of audience members. My favourite was two brothers or friends trying to mimic the acrobats on stage and nearly taking out the couple next to them as the older of the two twirled the younger around in his arms. Super adorable, and clearly shows that audiences were enjoying the spectacle"

*Peer Reviewer Observation, Back to Bransholme*

"... the whole audience ... were engrossed until the end. Several of the girls were making butterfly shapes with their hands unprompted when the caterpillar went into his cocoon."

*CTO observation, Slime*

"At the end of the performance there was prolonged clapping and a standing ovation. Again, many audience members provided spontaneous comments: amazing, brilliant, absolutely brilliant, really good."

*CTO observation, Fagin's Twist*

"Performance starts with artist coming out from behind a piano, children enthralled, smiling and watching intently... Artists are at each end of the mat, moving the large sheet of paper in a wave motion, children follow it moving their heads from side to side as if watching tennis. Artist lifts the paper over the children sat at the front, they all giggle. ...Artist brings out a yellow paper boat, children transfixed watching artist move it in a sailing motion. Boy almost moves onto mat and mother gets him sat down again. Little boy points at boat, looking back at parents. ... Next out was a blue plane, artist moves around in a flying motion. Little girl sways in time with the motion. She jumps up and down and then mimics the arm movements of the artists."

*CTO observation, Mr Satie*

But the responses for the audience weren't just about artistic outcomes. Some audience members have clearly been deeply moved by the resonance and 'local impact' of the material to their places, experiences and lives. For example the case study of the Boxer below shows one of the several times when Chat to Ours members reported hearing a very positive experience from a member of the audience.

### **Case Study: The Boxer**

Before the show, a member of Chat to Ours had met a female audience member in the bar area. Along with her father-in-law and husband, they approached the same person after the show to provide feedback on her experience. She wanted to ensure that we passed on their sincere thanks to everyone at Back to Ours for showing Delicate Flowers at Willow Social Club.

Her father-in-law had recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and had been a professional boxer at a very high level in his younger days.



A Chat to Ours volunteer spoke with him and he became engaged in a long, detailed conversation about his boxing career. He had fought and sparred with the best boxers of the time. He had narrowly missed the British Heavyweight Champion title due to a cut eye – but later beat that opponent who claimed the crown. He didn't think women were built to box but was interested in seeing the play.

The prompt of this play had brought back many memories long forgotten – his relatives agreed he had not spoken as much for a long time. He had enjoyed the performance and applauded the talented lass who 'really got that straight punch just right'.

His family commented that his facial expressions and interaction levels during the show had been heightened, and they were staggered at his recall of memories and level of concentration, which he had not demonstrated in weeks.

Chat to Ours feedback, *Delicate Flowers* at Willows Social Club, Feb 2019

### 3.1.2. Peer Reviewers' views on quality of the art

Peer reviewers were invited for the October 2018, May 2019 and October 2019 Festivals, and were selected both for their artistic and artform background (experienced theatre makers/producers as it was a mainly theatre-led offer, experience of large-scale outdoor events for Back to Bransholme) and for their experience of programming in less traditional venues and in participatory art/CPP. They were asked to comment on excellence through the ACE quality metrics. All felt the artistic quality of the work offered was in most cases as high as would be expected in a traditional setting, or other appropriate comparator. The programme has no sense of lowering expectations to fit with programming in different venues.

"The performance had considerable skill, was well thought through, had a good flow and high production values"

*Peer Reviewer: Mr Satie*

"Bullish was an exciting production, different to other queer work that I have see[n] but I felt it had a range of influences including Duckie and queer cabaret-style theatre, devised performance including Forced Entertainment, heightened poetic text based work, etc. In bringing together these forms Bullish felt to be part of a catalogue of original developmental work that is challenging and rewarding. It was great to see this in the school's venue in the Festival ... I found the production highly skilled, original and theatrically confident."

*Peer Reviewer: Bullish*

For the May and Oct 2019 Festivals, all three reviewers noted the relevance of the work to the local setting, and how it had been adapted and developed to ensure it fitted in this setting:

The piece felt unique to Bransholme and it felt unique that this production was being staged in the middle of Bransholme's main shopping area. The ambition of the piece, logistics of it, the setting and community elements were highly provocative and exciting.

*Peer Reviewer: Back to Bransholme*

... [the staging used the location well] the brightness and constant level of light meant that it had the very Brechtian effect of ensuring no separation from the stage to the audience - the front row of small floor carpet cushions gave that illusion nicely but it was not intimidating

*Peer Reviewer: High Horse*

They were particularly impressed by the resonance, challenge and local meaning making



HIGH HORSE is a great title, inviting young people to get on their “high horse” and let out some personal power statements. Very much an interesting concept that should be developed further.. Was it thought provoking? Yes due to the unexpected and ‘impossible to plan for’ contributions by the young people in the audience. In the first performance a packed house also had one very chatty 4yr old. The main actor did a good job of dealing with his interruptions ... it was a good exercise for the parents and grandparents to hear their young people speak out.

*Peer Reviewer: High Horse*

This is amongst the most consultative and highest quality arts engagement work being carried out in a low arts engagement area and an area of deprivation of the UK. This is particularly the case when you look at the run up to delivering this show, with other art projects and performances taking place in the area and shopping centre previously.

*Peer Reviewer: Back to Bransholme*

And they recognised the audience’s captivation

... it had a very positive effect on the family audience - children loved sharing gags with their mums/dads, parents seemed to enjoy laughing at themselves and with each other which is something that cannot be underestimated.

*Peer Reviewer: Chores*

Adding input to other events was also well perceived in terms of quality, for example The Big Malarkey Children’s literary festival was supported by Back to Ours to allow them to include a strand for 11-16 years olds (raising the age range of the festival from the typical 5-12 yr olds). In 2018 the quality was positively received by a peer reviewer who commented on the range and interest of what was on offer.<sup>39</sup>

The take up of the offer (a series of performances, activities and workshops aboard and around an old bus) wasn’t as high as would have been hoped, which the organisers put down to the need to get information out more as most attenders weren’t expecting activities for this age range. Responding to this, in 2019 the Big Malarkey team asked Chat to Ours to do some audience observation of the Festival, finding the feedback extremely useful for shaping work going forward.

All respondents to the arts partners survey felt the quality of the product which was produced, commissioned or co-produced with Back to Ours was ‘excellent.’<sup>40</sup> This was corroborated by the challenge and exposure to something new which this input offered both to them, and to their audience/participants.

What is most telling in all these responses is that there is never a mention or implication that they feel it was excellent quality “considering it was held in a school” or “considering it was arts aimed at engaging new audiences”. The level of quality is being assessed against their existing experiences (in the peer reviewers’ cases major (non-Hull) festivals), and the mention of the venue or audience is in terms of how well they accommodated a non-traditional venue in terms of staging etc. This both indicates the level of the work – national standard at least, and the buy in to the Back to Ours ethos, achieved in the case of the peer reviewers through a very short briefing paper on intent.

Although there were some ways in which the reviewers feel the work could be improved, often arising from the need to stage in very unusual settings, and the commitment to delivering with a large local cast, overall the feedback on quality was very positive. The challenge for Phase 2 in terms of assessing excellence needs to move from feeling the need to justify it as high quality work, to exploring what impact the quality itself has on participants and audiences.

<sup>39</sup> See: <https://ameliainhull.wordpress.com/2018/06/24/the-big-malarkey-festival-and-the-blundabus/>

<sup>40</sup> Based on 3 responses to an arts partners survey.





### 3.1.3. Programmers' intentions for the quality of the audience experience

The quality of the programme overall is ensured by a strong artistic vision held and shared within the Back to Ours team.

This centres around a belief in the ability of high quality art, if programmed and marketed appropriately, to engage people who don't typically attend arts venues and festivals. It recognises the fact that people aren't typically attracted by an artform or title, but by the sense that they are welcome, it will work for them.

The Artistic Director takes a direct and strong lead on all programming decisions for Back to Ours. These lie well beyond typical direction, into brand, marketing and most of all 'feel'. As a result, any understanding of quality within Back to Ours needs to see the experience – 'the art' - starting not at the door of the hall where the play is held, or the car park within Bransholme, but at the point people first hear about it. This experience is curated and supported from the beginning, through a careful process, so that people feel the event offers something for them, and that they will be ok to come to it. This careful and holistic approach to programming allows for much more 'challenge' to audiences to take risks to be placed within the setting: they have already been sold on it well before they walk through the door.

In doing this, she builds on her many years of experience in programming, and in engagement work in Hull to come up with work that will attract and engage audiences, while also aiming to support and challenge them to try new experiences. This method has been skillfully shared through the team, including with partner artists, venues and key volunteers. It is being recognised by other local arts organisations and is beginning to be asked for and valued within the city, though recognition is lower than it deserves.

The story is everything - Back to Ours has the analogy of the journey threaded through: Festival attendees are taken on a journey which aims to test the removal of different barriers to engagement: costs, location, travel, intimidating front of house, lack of confidence in 'art' or one's ability to appreciate/enjoy art. This has been done through removing different ones at different points. Evaluation of the effects of this have not been systematic but there is constant observation feedback and reflection within the team.

Another story beginning to come more to the fore is of the 'party' – the Shindigs and 'Doos' which as with the journey (on a bus – room for all), evoke a sense of welcome, fun, and a place to try something new, let your hair down and take a risk.

#### **From Festivals to Productions**

Back to Ours effectively inherited the Festivals model from Hull 2017. These were popular, easy to dip in to, offering a range of things: band, secret gigs, children's show, more artistic/adult show, on a regular cycle - every half term break.

Over the course of Phase 1, Back to Ours took their loyal Festivals audience on a journey, increasingly raising the level of challenge, and distinctiveness within the Festivals, and slowly changing the format. This was needed in order to make it more financially viable (the level of programming was too high for the budget in Phase 2 to manage) but more importantly, to embed the work more closely into the neighbourhoods where it took place, and into the wider cultural ecology.

This move also brought together the production work of Back to Ours – with their commitment to producing their own work central to how they operate – with the participative and neighbourhood work, alongside their work to develop new venues for art. This culminated in the Back to Bransholme show in Oct 2019 which was entirely written and produced in house, with a partner venue where the relationship has developed over time, involving many of the local groups, volunteers and artists they have worked with, and marketed largely through local Hub networks. This show felt like a marker in the sand to show that the artistic vision of Back to Ours is possible:

- Challenging, excellent and resonant work;
- Co-developed and produced with local people and participants;
- Located in everyday places people go to anyway;
- And great fun to be part of.



## 3.2. The Hubs: ensuring and developing a community voice in programming and commissioning

The approach taken to community voice within Back to Ours aligns with the style of the team, being based in creating a sense of a shared purpose, a wider team which is volunteers, Hub members and staff, rather than a separate group of community members who are external to 'the team'.

The central mechanism to include community voice in programming and commissioning, as well as in marketing and communications is the Hubs programme which is embedded through all the other strands of Back to Ours.

The initial purpose of the Hubs was to get people involved in the programming and planning of the Back to Ours Festival, and over the Phase this has been extended to ensuring a community voice in programming across Back to Ours generally, including the commissions and the evaluation. Future work will take this voice further, allowing people from neighbourhoods across Hull who don't typically attend arts events to directly feed into programming of work with Back to Ours and partners.

### 3.2.1. The Hubs model

The Hubs have been rolled out incrementally since 2018, and are still in development. The first Hub was set up in East Hull followed by Hubs in Bransholme (North and Central), Derringham and Orchard Park, each of which are areas of higher deprivation. Each of the Hubs is different and they have evolved naturally, although they have common goals and reasons for coming together.

Back to Ours have issued one open call for Hub members. More common has been a direct approach, inviting individuals the Back to Ours team have come across at arts events, inviting in the critics and supporters alike. This has been a productive approach, which follows the idea of building a 'coalition of the willing'.

*I'm really proud to be part of something that I have enjoyed as "punter" for so long  
Hub member, survey*

Back to Ours have targeted areas of Hull they are both familiar and unfamiliar with. For example, Derringham was identified as an area of the city that "had notoriously low engagement". It has been hard to establish a Hub in this area, but the Back to Ours team are trying different approaches to see what works. Areas such as East Hull and Orchard Park have historically had relatively high levels of investment and support from the voluntary and statutory sectors. This is evident in that key organisations, such as St Mike's Youth Centre in North Hull Estate and the Willows Social Club in East Hull are open and willing to being part of the Hub membership and are proactive in developing partnerships working for the area.

There are currently around 86 people involved in the Hubs across the city. They are starting to develop their own identity and go in their own directions, as members have different skills and life experiences to bring to the meetings. Back to Ours want to keep the Hubs 'open' so that people can get involved where and when they want to. The Hubs are seen by the Back to Ours as the main connector between Back to Ours and the public, and 'building trust' was mentioned as a key factor here.

The model of the Hubs is specifically not a formally constituted 'panel' approach, for example voting within the decision making on commissions, or meeting in a structured way to comment on the programme. Within the vision of the Director, they join in the wide and evolving conversation which is the planning, development, implementation and reflection on Back to Ours.

The mechanism for feeding into decisions is through through building relationships with Hub members, regular Hub meetings often with Back to Ours Director attending, supplemented by informal chats and feedback, chatting to members at events as well as asking the Community Engagement Manager to request additional input.

This represents a specific artistic and strategic decision made by the Director, based on an assets based approach to co-creation. It is also an evolving process, initially it was anticipated that hub members would play



a role in the commissioning panel that made the decisions about the open commissions. However there were time pressures around getting back to people which made it unrealistic to be able to bring hub members into meetings, as well as questions amongst the team about whether that was an unfair amount of pressure to be placing on community members.

“How much pressure are we putting on community members to make decisions that should be our decisions? What we want is for them to be involved in the creation of the work, not necessarily like make them feel like they have to sit on a panel and they could be making a wrong or a right decision.” –

*Programme Manager and Producer*

As a result, hub members have been involved in different ways with different commissions as it would be impossible to get a one size fits all approach to work. Some attended a workshop session with artists and offered a sounding board as to what would or wouldn't work in local areas

### 3.2.2. Outcomes for Programming Quality and Relevance

As is clear from the research carried out by the University of Hull's CPPI (see Appendix 3), the Hubs are already bringing tangible benefits to programming, through being able to provide specialist and localised knowledge about their neighbourhoods. An example was given by one Hub member about the commissioning of a Rugby Union show. They felt strongly that this would not work in Hull, as “Hull is Rugby League”. This is reinforced by the findings of other CPP projects. *LeftCoast's Evaluation Report*<sup>41</sup> describes how the commissioning of a spectacular Viking boat burning was shelved because the commissioning panel pointed out that the event may be too similar to the local history of scuppering boats in difficult financial times. This could have created a bad response to the event itself.

In terms of the Festivals, hub members' involvement developed and grew from Festival to Festival. Hub members have been involved in go and see trips from which they have been able to make recommendations for the programme. For example the programming of the Giant Jam Sandwich in the February 2019 Festival was a direct result of hub members experiences of seeing it at the Edinburgh Fringe, Chores in May was also chosen by Hub members. They were crucially involved in reviewing the Festivals approach and impact and feeding future programming ideas to the Back to Ours team.

The Hubs have been involved in several of the commissions, with artists really appreciating having the voice of local people involved in the work from the outset. This allows socially-engaged practice to be shaped and modelled by the people locally who best know the neighbourhoods it intends to affect.

The participants engaged across all aspects of the project. ... they instantly challenged the Monster concept saying that, for them, their monsters had not arrived in a flash. Their monster was loneliness and had arrived slowly, by the time they realised it was there it was almost too late. We loved this riffing on our theme and built a monster with them that had long suffocating tentacles. .

*Commissioned Artist Survey*

The Bransholme Hub was crucial in the design, research, planning and production of Back to Bransholme and helped significantly in the marketing, particularly word of mouth. They have taken a lead in the Living Room project and a few Hub members form the steering group – with some input from Back to Ours.

The Chat to Ours research team is explicitly being expanded with recruitment of Hub members, alongside the first wave who were mainly Hull 2017 volunteers. This will continue to happen, with Tony as engagement lead

<sup>41</sup> See Froggett et al (2018: 55) available here: <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/21670/>



looking out for people who are particularly suited: good at observing and noticing, open minded and ready for a challenge, and inviting them to get involved.

This model of slowly increasing involvement of Hub members into every aspect of Back to Ours will continue during Phase 2 and forms a cornerstone of the work.

The benefits to the team of this approach are clear, over the past year the Hubs strand has enabled members of the team to feel confident that if you programme the right things in the right places then people will get excited about them, but that developing a relationship based on trust is critical. To develop that trust, personal contact and human conversation is key. As such reacting to enthusiasm has been an important currency, directing both artists' commissions and Festival programming into venues and neighbourhoods as an appetite to receive it develops.

Fundamentally, this approach of involving everyone in a wide and accessible conversation which develops a programme together has the potential to be among the more radical ways of approaching the central CPP theme of community voice in programming. Its strengths lie in the potential to remove a lot of structural barriers to power shifting, and in particular doesn't allow one to assume inclusion due to the existence of an inclusion mechanism (for example: we know we have a community voice in programming as we have a panel of community members which we consult).

Inevitably its challenges lie in the same arena, as the outcome is dependent on a style and approach which needs to be based on real respect and care, and on a huge amount of time input. The development of a highly skilled team, with shared core beliefs and mostly intuitive ways of engaging with people from all areas, has made this possible. It has however been a slow, time consuming process, and funders and those hoping to copy the successes need to recognise ALL the work and time which goes in, not try and shortcut to results.

It has been recognised that the value of this approach, as well as its true cost, need to be more clearly articulated, so this will be built into Phase 2 evaluation. This will offer the benefit of being able to share it with other programmes more easily.

Overall, a real ownership and inclusion – leading to a shifting of the inherent power balance within an arts project – which is an elusive goal for many arts organisations, is looking to be a real possibility within Back to Ours through this informal shared conversation approach to community voice. However, it will be a challenge to create, to maintain, and to evidence.

### 3.3. Supporting excellence of art and engagement for Hull artists

#### 3.3.1. The Commissioning approach

Part of the aim of Back to Ours was to support the development of the local cultural sector, specifically to support emerging and established artists and artist-led groups seeking to develop co-creation and co-production with local communities. Coupled with this focus on the practice with communities, was the commitment to actively support the growth of new talent for emerging sectors in Hull: dance, literature and visual and digital arts.

The Back to Ours programme has this ambition threaded through it, for example through the support to 'The Herd' to develop their show, *Slime*, for the Back to Ours October 2019 Festival, then to tour it to a further 19 locations in the wider region in Autumn 2019. However the core strand which delivers this is the Commissions strand, which has two elements: an open commissioning programme and more strategic commissions to contribute to the development of the creative sector in Hull.

In setting up the open commissioning programme, the team drew upon experiences of a two-phase process gained through the Land of Green Ginger project undertaken by Hull 2017. As mentioned above, the whole programme suffered from the need to condense what was supposed to be three years of work into not much more than two. The two-stage approach adopted by the staff team enabled an immediate start with an open call for commissions from anyone who was interested, while not having a rushed process and the first stage



could act as a supported initial R&D stage. This allowed the more substantial investment to be saved for the next stage, with projects who would be able to manage this, and work in a CPP way.

The team very much wanted to make a process that would give a chance to all and any artists to get a start, ensuring that emerging talent would have a route into support to grow ambition and quality. For this reason they took two strategic decisions in the design of the first stage applications, both of them aimed at reducing initial pressure on non-traditional and emerging artists:

1. They took the strategic decision to offer 100% funding at this stage (counter to recommendations from ACE around CPP funding):

“I knew that if we had to wait for other funding to come in it would hold all of the projects back and put extra pressure on artists to raise funds.”

*Artistic Director*

2. Building from learning from Hull 2017, they developed an approach to commissioning based around conversations with team members, rather than a traditional application form:

“We were also clear that didn’t want it to be an application form where you sit at home, you fill out an application form on your own and worry about what to write ... we felt that people had to develop a relationship with us, so we decided to have workshops, which was a good move. We did a callout and anybody who was interested in a Back to Ours commission could come to one of the workshops, and we had different bits of information available, it was a bit like speed dating, you spent time talking to staff and Community Hub members...and we talked about what the commissions would involve”

*Artistic Director*

This worked in the number of people who came forward, several with very little experience of commissioning. The brief was very broad, only requiring that the project must engage new audiences. The team found that the breadth of the brief was actually quite hard for some people, as they were used to delivering to something very specific. The team took an active approach of helping them think about what new audiences might mean to them, and involving the Community Hub members helped with this.

The approach taken thus built understanding of the value of the process, and the audience, rather than a focus on end goal:

“We were describing it as “We’re more interested in the process than the sparkly end product. You don’t need to get to that end product you don’t need to think about that.”

*Artistic Director*

For some artists, this was a break through experience, opening up opportunities and approaches they’d been waiting for. Many have radically changed their project from their initial idea, particularly for some through a relationship with community members via the Hubs. In addition, the team has found there was a need to encourage more ambition, as artists are used to being told to scale things back, or be safe in terms of definitely achieving particular outputs. This approach has most definitely brought out those artists who are most ready to take a creative approach to engaging with communities to make exciting work – to take risks and thus create distinctive, excellent work.

The process has worked for artists, in a focus group looking back at the whole process in Oct 2019, they all felt positive about the commissioning process, many saying it was a refreshing change from the usual forms. The approach meant they felt trusted and given the support to develop and deepen the projects themselves

“Back to Ours just trust [us] to get on with it. They have confidence in us, and know we will deliver...”



“The ability to let us get on with minimal restrictions.”

“...being trusted to just get on with it”

“...[the] BTO producer has been a great asset to us in drawing in this funding, producing both projects, introducing us to new professional partners such as Hull College and Hull University. BTO support has been incredible, they respond quickly, they have been approachable, they help shape ideas and they have welcomed us into their community”

*Commissioned Artists via Artists' Survey*

The skills and experience of the producers are valued, and artists liked both having a consistent producer allocated, and the sense of being given the time and funding support to develop deeper understanding as well as practical and creative help.

Adopting this approach and communicating that to the artists who wanted to apply for funding has helped the commissions funded through this route to be more reflective about the processes they use, and thus beneficial to the development of the creative sector in Hull, especially around social-engaged practice.

Evaluation of this process was mainly carried out through an embedded approach, where the artists on receiving their commission, put together a Story of Change to explore who they want to affect, what's the difference they are trying to make, and what approaches and principles they have. They then were asked to revisit these elements as they continued their project, to explore how they have evolved in the R&D process, and then through the second stage. Some artists had used and valued this, and the initial thinking around the project was useful. But the separation of this process from the producer support role meant it wasn't used as well as it could be.

This indepth and adaptive process has, however, placed a huge strain on the team, as there were flexible deadlines, meaning the inception work had to be done mostly individually, and the level of support given meant that there was a lot of work for team members who supported them. The rolling deadline also meant that it was hard to ensure that the numbers were kept manageable, as good projects would come along later and the team are very enthusiastic and want to support as much as they can.

It is clear with the reduction in funding this approach would need to radically change in Phase 2, and the commissioning will move to a more Hubs led model – which was what artists really liked when it worked. The principles of openness to ideas and challenge, and reflecting on and adapting the projects as they develop should be kept within the new model.

Within the Back to Ours programme there have also been a number of projects that have been funded for strategic reasons. Having been mandated to contribute to the development of visual arts, literature and dance in the city, this has led to further commissions and partnerships. On the visual arts the programme has taken the decision to contribute through the City's Visual Arts Strategy which is currently under development, as well as the recently developed Gallery Forum. To support literature, specific commissions have been made including those with First Story, Big Malarkey and a literature project in East Park in which hub members have taken a central role. Then to develop dance in the city, Back to Ours have been working with Hull Dance and with the Hull Independent Producer Initiative. Other strategic commissions have involved partnerships with Pride in Hull and Freedom Festival around increasing artistic quality and community engagement respectively.

### 3.3.2. Artists' experience and outcomes

The impact of the commissions on artists and participants included:

#### **A change in attitude to working in Hull**

Among the artists who responded to the survey, everyone reported being more positive about working in Hull, whether or not they had worked in Hull before. They had made new contacts, those who had worked in Hull before felt they'd reached new communities and/or taken new approaches.





“...this project has allowed us to work with new groups and in new ways which has given the company a new [prospective] on the type of work we do going forwards.”

“I am hull born and bred and love working in the city! But BTO made me realise how amazing it could be working in areas such as Bransholme which I’ve not worked in before.”

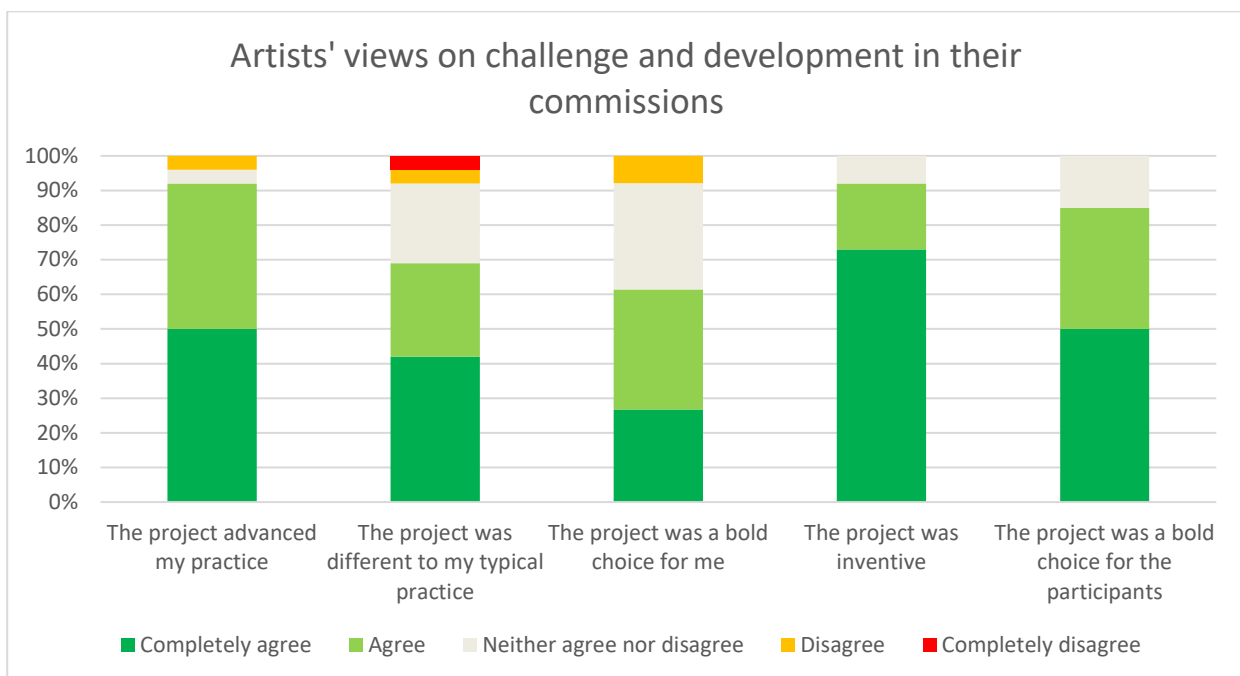
“Back to Ours took a risk on us being able to produce a live show and this makes us feel that in Hull you can find backing for experimental and innovative projects. Back to Ours and Hull are open to new ideas.”

“This company is perfect for community and audience engagement. The team really hits the nail on the head for that. I don’t think any other production houses in Hull do this.”

*Commissioned Artists via Artists’ Survey*

## Impact on artistic practice

Figure 17: Artists' views on the levels of challenge and development in their commissions



As the chart above shows, artists did feel that the commissions advanced their practice (92% agreed or completely agreed), but also that they were inventive and a bold choice for participants. There was lower agreement with it being ‘a bold choice for me’ – some of which was explained in terms of them already doing this sort of work.

Those that had got the most from the commissions in other ways – e.g. felt it had been positive in terms of networks, support etc – also tended to feel they had challenged themselves more.

They also felt it had made a positive difference to their career, professional development or practices and that it broadened opportunities available and increased peer support networks and/or professional relationships. The biggest difference the project made to artists included being able to try out new innovative ideas, ongoing learning with Back to Ours, seeing this part of the city and people in a new light and to make and appreciate many new connections, and a sense that ‘dots were being joined’ in the arts and crafts community in Hull.

Others said they were delivering work in entirely new ways and new artforms and some had revised the way in which they viewed their own work:



'This has opened things up for us, ideas that we might have developed as films are now being developed as live events. It feels exciting to be making stuff in the real world as well as for the screen.'

'Now moving towards pursuing these activities as a career, rather than on a voluntary basis.'

'A change in mindset to where I can use my talents. Not just in a professional theatre show or concert but in an environment that can impact people's wellbeing in the community.'

It allowed me to reconnect artistically and personally to the city of Hull. Which plays a major part of my creative research.

I have been able to flex my artistic muscles on a chunky project. So it's made a massive difference.

*Commissioned Artists via Artists' Survey*

## Community engagement and co-creation

Almost all the artists felt the community engagement was 'good' or 'excellent'. When asked directly about what extent the work was co-created with participants the responses varied, with half saying it was 100% co-created, although analysis of the explanations shows that in some cases this was more about audiences/participants feeding into an artist created idea. This links to the prior level of experience people have in co-creating with audiences, there was generally a strong confidence in their previous experience, but some didn't feel they had much experience, and perhaps this affected their answers.

"I noticed that once you can establish trust with participants, they will be much more willing to participate, and I've also learned that this takes time, and that there should always be a time frame for getting to know participants. I also believe that it is probably not beneficial to introduce yourself as an 'artist' seeing as this immediately can act as a barrier, instead it is more beneficial to say that you are working on a project...etc and then introducing the basic ideas comprising the project. This engages people with themes and activities first and foremost."

What has made an impact is being able to work with communities in a new art form. Doing this really helps us as it keeps our work fresh, there is some risk involved for us and we learn new skills. On this project we are learning with the participants as well as teaching them. There is something exciting about that process that has enhanced our work with communities

*Commissioned Artists via Artists' Survey*

## Outcomes for participants

When asked about the most significant change during the commission so far, most responses mentioned growth in confidence of participants, which increased concentration and involvement, and also of the artists' expectations of them.

What has happened at Men in Sheds has been remarkable. There has been massive change in the men's willingness to get involved in a creative project and our expectations of what they can achieve. We are both pushing each other to try new ideas and create new kinds of monsters. When we began we were just talking and now the sessions are a hive of activity and creativity.'

I feel [the best things was] watching the local community change its opinion on art and become more engaged with colour and the project we was working on was a great experience

*Commissioned Artists via Artists' Survey*



## Working with Back to Ours

In terms of what made the difference, the artists are all clear that Back to Ours staff, experience and approach are at the heart of it:

'It is refreshing and rare to work alongside a team that, in my opinion, really 'gets it' - the need to stay open, flexible, brave, to keep excellence at the forefront whilst never 'doing art at people', the Hubs, the conversations, the blending of the familiar with the totally new, the constant reassurance mixed with creative challenge of the highest quality. All approaches I am committed to, and pleased to be part of'

[the commissioning workshop] invited artists to try new things, take risks, have fun, use humour and be imaginative. We came away from it feeling very strongly that we wanted to be part of what was happening.'

'...the way they work is the way I like to work the most.'

Back to Ours understands the barriers that people feel regarding engaging with culture and address them in very real and practical ways. They also celebrate the creativity of the communities of Hull in a confident and genuine way. We love working with Back To Ours!

Every project I work on is always so much more than I expect it to be

'We love this team, the sheer dedication from them is second to none.'

*Commissioned Artists via Artists' Survey*

The only negative in terms of experience was a sense that the marketing could be better (which in our experience comes up with every project) and a reflection of the rush and the wish for more time to be able to develop ideas.

In the focus group session in Oct 2019, reflecting back on the process, the group were positive overall about the level of support received, the challenge and opportunity. The area they most wanted to develop for the future was networking and discussions with other artists – many seemed to be discussing and sharing their projects for the first time at that session, and felt it would have been useful to do so more.

This echoes other requests and identification of the need for more artist development support in Hull – which some artists had expected Back to Ours to deliver. This request and opportunity is something which the Back to Ours team cannot deliver on alone, but should share with other members of the creative sector to see whether some sort of offer could be developed between them.



## 4. Developing a Back to Ours model

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ACE National CPP Research Question 3 asks Which approaches were successful and what were the lessons learned?

At the end of two full years of programming, it is becoming clear that there is a really exciting model emerging through Back to Ours, which is enabling deep and lasting engagement with arts, among and within neighbourhoods where the arts have never been recognised before. This is also leading to a growth in a sense of ownership, and ability to take action further within their neighbourhoods.

This 'model' is still hard to pin down, but it is clear there are a few ways in which Back to Ours is approaching the CPP experience which are specific, or even unique to Back to Ours among CPPs and among Hull cultural organisations, or certainly haven't been widely explored. It is essential that this learning is shared, and taken up by other organisations.

We find that:

- Back to Ours is built around programming unexpected events and combinations in unusual venues. This has been a very effective approach to build local partnership, particularly reaching beyond the arts, and to develop skills and capacity which will broaden the range of programming venues in the city
- This arose both from the warm, inclusive and capacity-building style of the team, who are good at recognising assets others have missed, and from the whole-hearted way in which programming partners have responded to the opportunity, showing the level of interest and appetite for this work across the city.
- Back to Ours has a strong commitment to ensuring community voice shapes the programme in all aspects, going well beyond the Hubs strand. This is approached through an explicitly informal route, drawing on interpersonal skills, relationships and a sense of creating a conversation around what works and what is needed from which the programming is developed.
- This can be an incredibly effective and empowering approach, but it takes time, and relies on the intention and skills of a very experienced and committed team. It is currently carried out in an intuitive way, which should be shared through explicit partnering with other organisations, or through further discussion and articulation.
- The brand of Back to Ours works well with audiences to give a sense of safety and to help them take steps into new experiences. The brand highlights these approaches, the inclusion, shared journey, the everyday nature of arts and culture, and the warm welcome. This is a great basis for others to begin to understand and take on board the practice around programming and community voice more clearly.
- Back to Ours is having an impact on Hull's communities, particularly in the Hub neighbourhoods in terms of increased arts appetite and cultural confidence, in terms of sense of belonging and pride in their areas, and sense of value and confidence to try new things.
- The team and programme embody action learning in their whole approach, allowing them to adapt and change the programme on a regular basis and try out new approaches. The evaluation approach, particularly the Chat to Ours team, and the embedding of reflective thinking for members of the team tie in well to this. This explicit embedding of reflective evaluation within programming will deepen in Phase 2.

### 4.1. Unusual people and places: programming new venues in new ways

Programming in unusual ways, in unusual venues was the initial core idea which grew into Back to Ours. It was felt to fit well the CPP approaches both of reaching new audiences and of working in unusual partnerships, particularly working with non-arts organisations. As a result, this has been the programming focus for Phase 1



of Back to Ours CPP. The heart of this has been the Back to Ours half term Festivals, which grew out of and transitioned fairly seamlessly from the Hull 2017 Festivals, and ideas originating even before then.

In fact, the idea for Back to Ours originated 8 years ago through conversations in the Arts Development Unit at Hull City Council, as a Government education scheme - Building Schools for the Future - had rebuilt all the Secondary Schools with high quality performance spaces, thus providing a unique opportunity to showcase high quality performing arts in estate-based neighbourhoods. These actions and choices have informed and defined the performing arts character of the Back to Ours Festival today.

In 2016, Louise Yates (now Director of Back to Ours) was a Hull2017 Producer and Arts Development Officer at Hull City Council. She secured £269k from the Arts Council's Strategic Touring Fund, to set up the first Back to Ours Festival, over 4 half term school holidays from February 2017–February 2018. A group of 8 venue managers from across Hull, was set up. This network brought together a range of well-established community spaces, including secondary schools, social clubs and a shopping centre. The venue managers were initially interested in hosting music events, and met regularly with Louise to support the planning, programming and naming of the Festival. Some venue managers really got on board with the process. Four half term Festivals took place as part of the Hull 2017 programme, in February, May, October of 2017 and February 2018. The February 2018 Festival was delivered by staff as part of the Back to Ours CPP programme, in partnership with Hull 2017 (now known as Absolutely Cultured). So Back to Ours CPP programming wasn't really in place until the May 2018 Festival and this was where the team were first able to move towards a more CPP approach and brand.

For the audience, the delivery of the Festivals in the continuing half-term pattern and similar programming format was felt to be almost seamless. This has benefits in retaining audiences, though contributes to some confusion over whether Back to Ours is the Hull 2017 legacy company despite concerted efforts to establish a separate identity. Balancing the benefits and negatives of this is a key issue for Back to Ours, but the relationship with Absolutely Cultured is strong, and there seems little confusion internally between the remits of the two so this is unlikely to be a problem if things continue as they have.

Exploring the learning from the approach taken, there are some emerging themes:

- 1) Relationship with and impact on the venues
- 2) Approaches to reaching new audiences through the Festival approach
- 3) Relationships between Hubs and Festivals
- 4) Summing up learning from the Festival approach so far.

#### 4.1.1. Relationship with and impact on the venues

In terms of the venues, the relationship has grown and strengthened during 2018, and they are happy with the approach taken by Back to Ours. As well as informal feedback during visits, we gained some direct feedback from venue managers via a survey in March 2019.

Four venues replied to the survey, one of whom had been working with Back to Ours since Hull 2017 days, the others were relatively new. They were very varied including a social club, a shopping centre and two churches.

They all had an extremely positive experience of working with Back to Ours, both in terms of the process, and the outcomes for them and their users/members.

Their reasons for first getting involved all centred around their position in the local community, whether it was making use of their space as a community venue and/or helping local community to engage with the arts. Two of the four directly referenced Hull 2017 as a route in:

*I am a City of Culture volunteer and did some performance with Back to Ours and thought it would be great to bring those events to our venue and community*



We wanted to work with the city of culture because we think we have the best facilities a club has got, they came to the club but never got back to us .so I got in touch with b t o and pleased to say they came and had a look and pleased with what they saw .

*Venue Managers Survey*

Working with Back to Ours brought something new into their venues, they agreed that the Festival is different to their typical activities, it advanced their ability to deliver a greater number of activities or more ambitious activities, that it engages residents from the nearby area as audience members and that it connects them with people who otherwise would not use their venue or engage with their organisation.

I didn't know what to expect but like the variation of acts that Back to Ours bring

*Venue Managers Survey*

They'd definitely gained skills and confidence in putting on arts events and were keen to continue and expand their involvement with Back to Ours and try a wider range of arts more generally.

Not as difficult as I had envisaged to make a big thing happen

*Venue manager Survey*

They felt the audience experience was very positive:

...people seem to be surprised at the experience

Enjoyable and professional

the cabaret shows are fantastic .and the play was close up and I don't think you get that as much in theatre

*Venue manager Survey*

The process worked for them too, with the more experienced venue manager noting an improvement over the course of 2017 and particularly in 2018.

In terms of marketing it was generally positive, though there was still room and ideas for improvement:

Improved since the departure of Hull 2017.

they really try and let as many people know what's happening and where with different advertising

Marketing in the local area could be higher - still people didn't know what was happening. Perhaps engage with events at the church to seek an audience. Eg Coffee mornings etc

*Venue manager Survey*

All felt that their views were listened to and taken into account by Back to Ours, and it is clear that Back to Ours has got the level of involvement right, although each of the four graded their levels of involvement in the production differently (from a little to a lot) they ALL felt it was just the right amount for them.

Asked if they would like to take a bigger role in future, the answers varied a little based on experience levels and time, with the more confident venue manager (with a background in event organisation) offering to take on more responsibility generally, while others offered smaller inputs like refreshments, marketing and 'helping out'.

This does point to the potential of 'mainstreaming' the Back to Ours experience with the staff team beginning to hand over some of the production to the more confident venues, although there are clearly some venues,





which work well for the community and thus should be supported, who will always need a lot of input to stage at this level.

#### 4.1.2. Approaches to reaching new audiences through the Festival approach

As discussed in Section 2 above, the Back to Ours team has taken an action learning approach to marketing and ticketing the Festivals, with a variety of ticket prices and structures over the Festivals in 2018 and early 2019. This has resulted in a wealth of learning on what could work which is being written up currently and will be included in the next report.

The reach of the Festivals is also discussed in Section 2, with a finding that a local audience is still coming, but there is also a much wider reach – to well beyond the Hull boundaries – and the proportion of the audience who say they are new to the arts is lower than would be hoped (at 25% for the Oct 2018 Festival for example). With the legacy of the substantial increase in attendance from 2017 work, it is too soon to say whether this represents a problematic lack of reach beyond the usual suspects, and certainly the Festival is reaching people in the areas around the venues, it worth the team bearing in mind exactly who they want to target, and what they feel the best audience mix would be.

##### **Case Study: Hotel Paradiso**

Back To Ours staff felt they had learnt a lot from the delivery of Hotel Paradiso during the February 2018 Festival. It was felt to be a success in attracting new audiences through creating links between site dressing to marketing for a more holistic experience.

“We made it really specific to the space we were in, ...in terms of an audience being engaged ... walking in we wanted them to think that their school was...Hotel Paradiso and when we considered the route they would take, you know it wasn't part of the show, but we had like a huge red carpet that we put down relatively early so we could get it a bit scuffed, so it looked a bit dishevelled and ...I got hold of ... signs saying like hotel and big closed things over them and things that would just hint as they were making the journey in, would hint towards the setting of the show then.

So it's not like very lengthy kind of engagement prior to the show...but from a production side ...it's just that little bit extra for them, the audiences, engaging them ... as soon as they're through the gates ... 'Oh this is different. We're not in that world anymore.' and I guess it engages them in a different way.”

*Production Manager*

“We had a circus show in ... an area in East that we have always wanted to get more people engaging, so that was a big opportunity for us...It took over the school atrium and there were participation opportunities for adults and young people, at that point the Festival was still funded through the Arts Council funding that sat with Hull UK City of Culture so we used some of the CPP money to make more of that stuff happen... We had lots of marketing opportunities as part of that, we had a retro car going round the estate, and we knocked on people's doors and handed out tickets to people and invited them as local people to come and see this amazing thing happening on their doorstep, and because young people were in the show as well, we got lots of new audiences from their families and friends.”

*Director*

Overall, the lesson taken from the experience of delivering this show was that there is value to be gained from investing more in overlapping community engagement and marketing activities. Approaches centred on human interaction and making the show experience even more immersive helped to develop the interest and trust of audiences who do not regularly engage with the arts.



### 4.1.3. Relationships between Hubs and Festival programming

In terms of the Festivals, Hub members' involvement has developed and changed from Festival to Festival. Hub members have been involved in go and see trips from which they have been able to make recommendations for the programme. For example, the programming of the Giant Jam Sandwich in the February 2019 Festival was a direct result of hub members experiences of seeing it at the Edinburgh Fringe. The Community Engagement Manager with the rest of the Back to Ours team has a role in working with the Festival to identify a match between audiences and artworks in response to the recommendations, ideas and wishes of hub members.

As described in Section 3.2 above, this approach aims to ensure a strong community voice in programming, as well as marketing and communications, while not forcing an unnatural or over formal system onto the Hubs. Hub members are attending the Festivals in greater numbers, and observation feedback from Chat to Ours indicates them having a strong sense of ownership of the programme. There's a desire to further develop the role that Hub members play in the Festivals, and also to look at how other programming can build on this work which is already underway.

#### Case Study – Hub-focussed performance programming: Aladdin

Although not part of the half term Festivals per se, the Aladdin Pantomime Tour in Dec 2018 also fits with the theme of programming into different venues or in unusual ways in order to reach and enthuse new attenders.

From his initial extensive scoping and relationship building to develop the Hubs, the Community Engagement Worker (who has a background in community development and community centres, rather than arts) noted the potential large gap between what was being programmed in the estates, and what people might feel comfortable with accessing. He also felt it was important in building a sense of ownership to explicitly programme something that they had asked for.

He identified 'the pantomime' as an iconic arts offer – the 'first step into engagement'

For most people the pantomime is where the love affair for the theatre first starts. The pantomime is the place where you tend to go as a family ... It's a chance to get together and have some fun and for those who have never seen a show or been to the theatre it's that first important step

However, for many on the estates, it was completely out of their price range to take that first step: between the cost of the tickets, travel and refreshments, they could end up spending £150 plus.

...So where is that first introduction to the theatre? Where is that family going out together? It's lost. Back to Ours is about introducing people to the Arts and the theatre, to encourage participation and enjoyment so for me it was a case of let's go back to the beginning. Let's as a team create a wonderful spectacular show and take it to the estates of Hull. Let's make it low cost to see the show, easy to get a ticket and give them an ice cream to watch it with. Let's make it hard to say "no I don't want to come".

He identified the aims as:

- I wanted to give as many people who would never go to the theatre or a pantomime because of barriers to buy a ticket and come and see a show on the door step with all the family.
- We wanted people to see the advertising and make a decision to go or not to go.
- We wanted people to talk to the family about who wants to go.
- We wanted people to collect the money and go and buy a ticket from the local ticket office we provided.
- We wanted people to get excited about the event and talk to others.
- We wanted to work with a local community facility and help them by putting on this big show in there building for their community.



- We wanted to gauge audience behaviour around the different estates we visited with the tour and how each community reacted to the show.
- We wanted to simply offer a community something they may not have seen before or experienced.

The venues and locations for the show were identified in terms of the target areas for the Hubs and where the relationship was strong: Orchard Park Estate – North Hull, Bransholme North, Derringham, Thornton Estate. Venues proved a challenge due to the decline in community facilities across the city and in one case, Back to Ours actually decided to help have the performance stage and hall painted and tidied up as they just didn't have the resources available to do it themselves. They chose 4 venues with capacities of between 150 and 250 each.

The pantomime was created 'just for Back to Ours by local people for the local people'. A local school, a performing arts academy, was keen to work with them and put together a show involving local people, full dress, production for touring and a good script for Aladdin.

Schools local to the venues were approached and asked if they would like to bring the children for free on the afternoon. Every school approached loved the idea and accepted the offer.

As with all other aspects, there was a lot of thought given to the marketing and ticketing in order that it reached the target groups:

As a team we come up with a marketing plan that would attract mainly local people to the show.

What we didn't want was lots of people from out the city buying tickets and the local people missing out, so I made the decision to not sell tickets online and to keep them local. We approached the venues and the local library and asked them if they would sell tickets for the show. They all agreed it was a good idea. The local libraries like selling the tickets as it meant more footfall and local people they haven't seen before in and out of the library.

We decided to set the ticket price at £3 per ticket for all ages. Pay for your seat. This seemed to work well, and it meant that the whole family could come along for less than £20. Another barrier taken away. We gave some complimentary tickets to the venues for anyone they felt still couldn't afford it at these prices. We really didn't want anyone to miss out because of reason. We wanted to help people.

We decided that we needed a striking poster to go in each venue and the local shops specifically for that area and not to advertise the whole tour to each area. Specific information for each area was what we decided on.

We had a leaflet created of the poster and this was delivered to 2000 homes that surrounded the venue. What we felt made a big difference with this drop was that we knew the man delivering the leaflet and he talked to people and created a bit of a buzz while out delivering the leaflet.

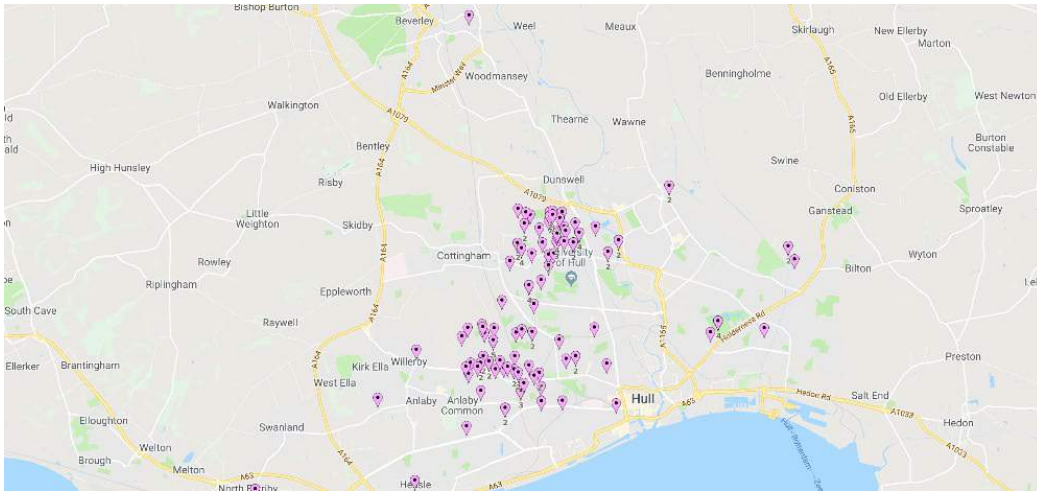
We had a stencil of the Aladdin logo made and this was jet washed in to the floor of the estates we were touring the show with, this was a reminder to the local people that the show was on and have you got your tickets yet.

*From Community Engagement Manager Reflection report*

Tickets were sold out for every show a week before the shows started, people were still asking for tickets right up to the start time and Back to Ours looked into whether more seats could be added legally, just to satisfy all the demand. The audience was 95% local, which was what was intended.



Figure 18: Postcodes of ticket buyers for the Dec 2018 Pantomime: note concentration in the Community Hub estates around Hull



Analysing the data from postcards collected from audiences, 39% said they'd not done any art in the last year. This may seem low for a CPP event, but it is worth bearing in mind that of the 61% 'previous engagers' a high proportion mentioned other Back to Ours events, and many others Hull 2017 events. Due to location, these are likely to be people who would fall into the lower engaging groups within Audience Spectrum (See Section 2.2.2) although we don't have the analysis at this level.

Audiences responded enthusiastically to the shows, and the sense of achievement for the Hubs in working with Back to Ours on this is clear.

Another outcome was the use of new venues, the pantomime was the first time that Back to Ours had used St Michael's Church in North Hull and Derringham Bank Methodist Church in west Hull. This has directly influenced the February 2019 Festival and the repeated use of these venues. In addition, there was a very material outcome for a local venue, there is a step at the entrance of St Michael's Church, the established solution amongst the church staff had been for an individual to lift wheelchairs up that step. During the pantomime, there were a lot of wheelchair users who were all accommodated, but the experience showed Back to Ours the issues with the venue. Planning on using it again, they decided they needed to invest in elements of infrastructure to make shows work in community venues, supporting St Michael's to install a wheelchair ramp to improve its accessibility on a permanent basis.

#### 4.1.4. Learning from the Festival model

The half-termly Festival model is the most recognised element of Back to Ours and rightly as a strong brand this was continued from Hull 2017 into the beginning of the CPP period.

The continuation of a similar model: a huge amount of activity; in non-traditional settings; in estates across the city; appealing to a range of ages; and across or combining multiple artforms has given a central thrust and recognition factor within the new brand of Back to Ours. It does work, as shown from this audience experience noted by Chat to Ours at Back to Bransholme

*"It's all about Bransholme, the war and all the different times and that... just bear with it, Paul... it's gonna be a bit fucking arty but you will get it mate."*

*Audience member at Back to Bransholme explaining the show*

Clearly it was a correct and clever decision to place this as the core of Back to Ours CPP programming.

However, the Festival does cause some problems, both practically and philosophically, for a CPP programme, and it isn't clear that it is achieving the reach into lower engaging groups that CPP programmes are tasked to deliver.



With the development of the Phase 2 business plan, the team has adapted the model, choosing the most important features of the core model: a regular programming cycle, in non-traditional venues and areas, and evolving it to more effectively achieve their goals with a reduced budget in Phase 2. These changes all arise from their informal evaluation and reflection on outcomes to date, as well as the philosophy of building on assets and feedback and ideas from their community partners within the venues and the Hubs.

Summing up the learning:

- The Festival format offers a way of quickly offering a high quality arts offer into areas with low arts activity or engagement, and a clear brand which helps with the marketing.
- It allowed the team to build creatively on the successes of the Back to Ours Festivals which were part of Hull 2017, thus keeping the brand recognition and sense of momentum. Back to Ours Festival has achieved a very strong brand partly due to its repetition: “every half term” but more likely due to the consistency of the quality of the offer.
- The range of different ages targeted within each Festival: including children’s shows, evening ‘cabaret’ style at working men’s and community clubs, theatre events and gigs, gives a sense of there being ‘something for everyone’ – something highlighted by the Hubs in their feedback on the Festival
- The team is still working to discover the right way to promote and market the Festivals, and how to price and sell tickets, but it is clear from audience and volunteer feedback that the audience feel very happy with what is being tried, and particularly feel that the team is trying and that their feedback is listened to, an impressive level of communication between a programming team and what is effectively an intermittent audience.
- The work with the venues is extremely effective and has built appetite and confidence to deliver the arts well beyond the usual venues, and into areas where there is little cultural delivery.
- Slowly introducing ‘riskier’ or more challenging programming alongside the everyday has seemed to shift perceptions and appetite to take risks. The model of Secret gigs, and similarly ‘everyday events’ such as ‘Shindigs’ and ‘Doos’ does allow the team to push boundaries and encourage people to try new things they might not realise yet that they will like, and there have definitely been cases noted by Chat to Ours where this opened a new range of interests within the arts to audiences. This will be studied further in the Phase 2 evaluation.
- The link between the Hubs and the programming of the Festivals, and then Back to Bransholme, has been very effective, giving an opportunity for both sides to learn and begin to work together on imagining, commissioning, programming and marketing events.

The issues with the original 2018 model, were used as learning points, often leading to success – for example a difficulty with a ticketing model led to new models of ticket sales and marketing which have been widely welcomed.

The team in addressing these have come up with an adapted model, with a mix of continued traditional ‘Back to Ours’ product: e.g. Secret Gigs at half terms, alongside new approaches which combine the best of the festivals with the benefits of the embedded work in key areas and with key groups. Back to Bransholme, the culmination of Phase 1, is a potential model for future work – albeit possibly on a smaller scale.

### **Case Study: Back to Bransholme<sup>42</sup>**

“Back to Bransholme” took place at the end of October 2019, with 1 hour long evening performances at 9pm each night for the first four nights of the half term holiday. The show took place outdoors in the east car park of North Point Shopping Centre in Bransholme, a housing estate in the north of Hull. The text that Back To Ours used to describe the show summarised it as:

<sup>42</sup> This case study is based mainly on primary research undertaken and a first draft produced by Dr Pip Gardner.



“Circus, opera, dance and seven decades of music collide in this epic journey through the heart and history of Bransholme, the triumphs, loves, losses and laughs of the 1940’s to now”

As one of the reviewers noted:

“This piece was the culmination of over two years work in Bransholme, which sought to challenge the feeling that culture isn’t something that happens in Bransholme, for the people of Bransholme or involving people from Bransholme directly.”

*Peer review, Back to Bransholme*

### *The Process*

The wider engagement work for the show had happened since the start of the Back To Ours CPP, though also arguably before that through Hull 2017’s projects on Bransholme estate and at North Point Shopping Centre in particular. Several key members of the team working on Back to Bransholme brought this experience from previous employment at Hull 2017 on these projects, and this informed the planning for an extensive R&D phase building up to the show over the two year period of CPP funding.

Throughout the show’s development, extensive story gathering took place in Bransholme to inform the creative content. Initially this took the form of a writer and a photographer undertaking a residency at North Point Shopping Centre. However, the approach of bringing in artists from elsewhere (in this case Leeds) didn’t seem to be working and this influenced the decision to bring more of the creative roles in-house and/or more locally based. During this period a creative team was created involving Lou Yates (Back To Ours Director) and Em Whitfield-Brooks (contracted to the project only) as co-directors of the show, along with Claire Drury (producer for both the show and Back To Ours as a whole) and Chrissie Lewis (Back To Ours Marketing Manager and commissioned writer for this and other projects).

Further story-gathering took place through engagement work around the Back To Ours festival programme in Bransholme, the growth of a Bransholme ‘hub’ of community members, and the development of The Living Room (a year-round space in North Point Shopping Centre managed by Back To Ours). Most of this activity was undertaken by members of the Back To Ours team and fed into the creative process for “Back to Bransholme” in an open and iterative writing process. Whilst it presented challenges in being a new way of working for some members of the team, the creative vision of the project relied upon a high level of flexibility until the last possible moments for certain decisions in order to be reactive and reflective of the community which the project sought to engage. Even the exact artforms to be used in the show were under discussion until relatively late in the project, for example the decision to not use projection elements wasn’t taken until late July 2019, ultimately as a result of cost implications and limitations of the structures available to project onto.

In total within the show, performers included:

- 5 band members
- 2 opera singers from Streetwise Opera
- 5 Hull-based singers brought together as a group by Back to Ours
- 8 dancers including 3 recruited from a local college alongside Skyline Studios
- 10 circus performers from Lost in Translation Circus
- 11 professional actors, including 2 voice actors and 1 named role actor
- 33 volunteer cast members who have been participating in development opportunities through Back to Ours’ “Act to Ours” project

Volunteer cast members were able to access development opportunities through the ‘Act to Ours’ project which has been ongoing and not specifically focused on the Back to Bransholme show. From summer 2019, the group of volunteers began rehearsing for roles within Back to Bransholme and came together with professional cast members much closer to the show.





Similarly, Back To Ours have been working with several individual singers who were working in small local venues in Hull. Back To Ours brought them together as a group for professional development in 2018, and began working with them to be part of Back to Bransholme in early 2019. However, involving them in the process so far in advance was found to have some downsides, with a couple of individuals dropping out in the run up to the show and a need to replace them with other professional singers in the latter stages of rehearsals.

Other groups of performers, including the band, opera singers, dancers and circus performers, devised and rehearsed their elements of the show separately with involvement and oversight from the core creative team. These were then brought together onsite, though restrictions to site access and adverse weather presented challenges to ensuring all elements of the show were adequately rehearsed in their entirety ahead of the opening night performance.

With restricted access to and occupation of the site at North Point Shopping Centre due to business operations, as well as a discovery of the occurrence of criminal and anti-social activities in the car park space outside of regular opening hours, the site build encountered a number of difficulties. In their later evaluation, Back To Ours team members reflected that some of these could have been overcome through clearer communication and a more open relationship between all parties including North Point Shopping Centre management and contracted suppliers.

### *Performers*

A survey of commissioned artists and performers received 11 responses. The respondents were all white with English as a first language. Half were male and half were female with a range of ages in brackets from 16 to 64. None identified as having a disability and nearly all the commissioned artists had worked extensively in Hull prior to Back to Bransholme.

All but one of the respondents felt that working on Back to Bransholme had increased their knowledge of the area and made them feel more positive about Bransholme, whilst all of the respondents felt it had enabled them to get to know more people locally. All respondents rated the quality of the engagement and the quality of the product as 'good' or 'excellent'. All of the respondents reported ways in which working on Back to Bransholme has contributed to their professional development a little or a lot. This included development around community engagement practice.

For my own practice, it's allowed me to expand into working in different ways and find creative ways of taking writing into a community.

*Artist from Back to Bransholme, Survey*

The biggest difference and challenge was working with the community cast. I have worked with many of them before but the experience of working with so many on such a grand scale of project was eye opening

*Artist from Back to Bransholme, Survey*

A participant survey was completed by 22 volunteer performers. The demographics given in the survey indicate that the volunteer cast was around 75% female and 25% male, all were white with English as their main language, almost 20% had a health condition or disability which limits their day to day activities a little, and half had been involved with Back To Ours since 2017 compared to around a third who joined in July or September when Back to Bransholme rehearsals commenced. Just under half of the cast currently or had previously lived or worked on Bransholme. A quarter currently have family who live in the area. In contrast 10% had never been to Bransholme at all before choosing to take part in the show.

Of the volunteer performers, 90% had done something similar before and 10% (2 respondents) hadn't. When asked why they got involved in Back to Bransholme, responses included: a love of performing, a connection to Bransholme, and previous positive experiences with Back to Ours. On average, respondents rated their overall experience at 9.5 out of 10. Respondents particularly liked: being part of the show and a sense of community,



the storyline, and the audience response. Things they did not like were the cold and the rain and conflicts with a paid actor leading the volunteer cast.

Eight out of the 22 volunteer performers reported a positive change to their opinions of Bransholme as a result of taking part in the show: "Once I thought it was an intimidating place. Now I see it as a cornerstone of Hull." In terms of other changes on their lives, participants reported a positive effect on their self-esteem and confidence as a result of taking part with an average rating of 68 out of 100, and with five respondents reporting 99 or 100/100:

"This is the first time I've had a speaking role in front of the public and I loved it. I've now got involved in pantomime and being a character in murder mystery events in my local area. It's boosted my confidence." – Volunteer Participant

### *Audiences*

Audiences loved the show, nearly all totally agreed they would recommend it to others. Most of the replies about the 'best thing' were: 'everything' or similar. The emotion generated by the points of recognition were the most notable:

[the highlight was] "...at the end when the audience sung along to "Don't Look Back In Anger" - this was quite emotional."

My highlight was getting out and seeing youngsters joining in without trouble and everyone getting on. There's a lot of good kids & people, but Bransholme is lacking entertainment for everyone & old.

"I found it truly amazing. Everyone who played the parts and the helpers. No words can describe the emotion, the reality of the time of the war, then the resurrection from gun emplacement etc to Bransholme as is now. Really, the social history from close living terraces in back streets to mass demolition to Bransholme. So many aspects covered of those years past and present."

*Audience members, Back to Bransholme Audience Survey*

But the small moments of connection amongst the large performance also struck a chord:

[my highlight was] .being given a carnation by one of the cast

The way the dancers interacted with the children. My grandson got one of the letters they passed out. He's put it in his keep safe box

*Audience members, Back to Bransholme Audience Survey*

"It captured I think local conversations...A lot of it was actually real. So people's real views on living on the Bransholme. Which is great, obviously we are a community shopping centre and...the key part of that event was tying in with the local community."

*– North Point Shopping Centre, Centre Manager*

The "Access Area" was well-used across all four nights of the show as a space with seating and where audience members could enjoy the show from a more contained area if they didn't wish to be in the midst of a large crowd. BSL interpretation was provided across all four nights with the interpreter's connections in the local community enabling the show to be promoted to and attended by D/deaf audiences. There were noise-cancelling headphones available which were used every night by different audience members, whether those with additional needs or for young children scared of loud noises. Whilst not provided to audience members on this occasion (although it was advertised), there is a desire to provide audio description in future.



Postcode data collected verbally on the night from a large sample of audience members, indicated that the majority of attendees came from the local communities and walked to the show. Anecdotal evidence collected suggests that many of those coming from elsewhere in Hull and East Riding, as well as a few from further afield, were motivated to attend by a personal connection to Bransholme.

The format of the show as a free, outdoor performance with an audience area with no clear boundary was successful in engaging local audiences, including those who may otherwise be seen as anti-social in their behaviours. Whilst some of these behaviours presented challenges for the team, including the security staff during the build and overnight between performances, during the performance itself, many of the individuals attended and appeared to enjoy the show.

### *Successes and Challenges*

The **relationship management** that was needed across the duration of the project was both a success and a challenge for the Back To Ours team. Together with the management of North Point Shopping Centre, the Back To Ours team were able to find solutions which enabled the delivery of the event with all parties agreement. However, reflections at the end of the project suggested a need for more regular meetings with the centre's management to enable it to run more smoothly. The Back To Ours team also developed strong relationships with traders and other staff across the shopping centre through the project, especially during the site-build, and these connections will help strengthen the organisations work at The Living Room going forwards. Having an ongoing presence in the community, and at the centre in particular, was felt by the team to be critical for creating a lasting impact around arts engagement.

Whilst the Back To Ours team, along with contractors, pulled together and were able to cover all the tasks needed during the live period, on reflection it was felt that they could have benefitted from the **additional staff capacity** earlier on, especially during rehearsals.

There were a few **production challenges** during the live period, including issues with getting the lighting right. With limited time on site for the build phase and adverse weather preventing tech runs and a full dress rehearsal from taking place, the team reflected and reacted on each performance night to identify ways to improve the audience experience with tweaks to the lighting and choreography to clarify the focus for different parts of the show. There were limitations to site access and weather conditions which would make this difficult to have approached differently, however the team took a lot of learning from the experience which they will be able to draw upon in future roles and productions.

The show hoped to contribute to **changing people's perceptions** of Bransholme and its community. Feedback suggests that this was achieved for people with a personal connection to Bransholme, with a sense of pride around their local community and an appetite for more arts events and provision as residents articulated a feeling that they have been under-served with this to date. However, the evaluation suggests that there is more to be done to change perceptions of those who do not have a personal connection to Bransholme, especially those who regularly engage with the arts. The Back To Ours team highlighted a lack of arts professionals from Hull attending the show, and mixed feedback from those who did suggesting it didn't align with their personal tastes or values. As such there seems to be a gap in knowledge, perceptions and approaches for engaging audiences in the places where they live which Back To Ours needs to continue to try to address.

Central to Back to Ours' approach to engaging communities in the arts is the premise that **everybody should be having a good time** – staff, performers, contractors and audiences. This was a success of such a large scale project over an extended period of time. Whilst in the post event debrief activities staff reported that they were tired after the delivery phase, there were fewer indications of negative emotions which are associated with poor management, disregard for wellbeing and ultimately burnout which might be common in other parts of the arts sector. Back To Ours' leadership is committed to protecting and improving staff wellbeing on the basis that if staff aren't enjoying the activity, then it is unreasonable to expect participants and audiences to want to engage. "Back to Bransholme" was a demonstration of this philosophy in practice.



## 4.2. Alongside in conversation - listening informally

Back to Ours has a very specific approach to engagement and community collaboration, which affects every aspect of their relationship with the communities they work with, as well as, to some degree, partners.

The philosophy behind this isn't always explicitly articulated in writing, but is clear almost immediately to anyone working with the team, as, like many aspects of Back to Ours, it is developed and shared intuitively and through experience. As this affects the programming and engagement approaches so much, we felt it was important to start to map this out and this will be continued – and its implications explored – into Phase 2.

As discussed in Section 3.2, there is a view that formal structures of engagement can come to be an aim in themselves, and may in fact mask a lack of real engagement. Furthermore, they can be very excluding particularly of those who are least likely to engage in the arts.

As a result, the Director has explicitly decided to steer away from any set model of consultation or ideas sharing, instead she and the team base their approach on being there, listening, spending time with people, talking, working alongside and developing and testing ideas through chats and other methods.

This is evident in the approach to marketing trialed in Feb 2019 and continued where appropriate – particularly during the lead up to Back to Bransholme - as a result of learning from Oct 2018 where the team went out into the communities, a couple of days after an intensive local leaflet drop, and chatted to people about whether they knew about the Festival, were they getting tickets. The director got her feedback this way, and thus felt confident in what was working, but also had a chance to get a sense from people in the target areas about how they viewed the marketing, the brand, and arts in general.

This is an extremely time-consuming approach, as to reach all areas, staff need to be out for considerable periods of time. In many cases volunteers or surveyors might be paid to do this, but it fits with the Back to Ours philosophy that the best way to know is to be there and speak to people.

Similarly the Director and team are very much present at all events, carrying out much of the front of house activity and chatting to audiences. This has a dual approach: ensuring the whole experience has a 'real Back to Ours' feel, but also giving on the ground and immediate feedback from audiences, and allowing an ongoing two-way dialogue about the programme. This is commented upon regularly by audience members and helps volunteers feel valued and part of the team.

The model of the Hubs is very much built on this approach. The Hubs have had considerable influence on decisions within the Festival Strand over the course of Phase 1 (around who to programme, what sort of artform would work, marketing and communications and reflecting back on what works); and in the Commissions Strand (around the development of the commissions, who they might work with, what is working or not and potential adaptations, and around what sort of commissioning might work in their areas). This approach is to be further extended in Phase 2 with Hubs at the heart of all programming decisions. However, none of this has been done through any formal mechanism, beyond the regular meetings in the Hub areas, and invitations to come to sharing events and workshops. There was no 'Hub representation' on the commissioning panel and there isn't, for example, a "community steering group" or similar.

Instead, the mechanism for community voice within the programme is the creation of a set of conversations, among staff, partners, volunteers and particularly Hub members and other community routes. This forms a space in which commissioning and programming arises – as a multi-locational ongoing conversation, from which the Director collates what matters and makes decisions.

This is a very interesting model, potentially offering a different route to sharing of power around programming. In this model everyone can contribute, within the area and in the way that feels important to them, different expertise can be recognised: artistic experience, knowledge of the local community, understanding of how to reach a particular age-group or social group etc.



## Case Study - A listening style of evaluation: Chat to Ours

Chat to Ours is a very nice touch and I saw them doing a great job of talking to the Mums and Dads about filling in evaluation forms etc. It didn't feel intrusive

*Peer Reviewer report*

The listening informally style of ensuring community voice is mirrored in the decisions and emphases within data collection. As discussed elsewhere, data collection for Back to Ours has been an issue in terms of them following on from the Hull 2017 experience. This has had the positive effect of making the team very keen to try new approaches which are in themselves more empowering to participants and better for action learning. The apogee of the 'in conversation' style of Back to Ours consultation and community voice feed in within evaluation is the Chat to Ours community research team. This group of volunteers literally are alongside the audience, listening informally and sharing their learning back with the rest of Back to Ours.

Chat to Ours developed from the Hull 2017 training of some of their volunteers in data gathering techniques (mainly delivering surveys). A keen group of Hull 2017 volunteers, now working with Back to Ours as well, initially approached the Director after helping with front of house at a Festival to say that they had noticed lots of things during their volunteering, and was there a way of them feeding this back.

The Director immediately grasped the value of this in fitting with the listening informally style, and asked them to notice things at the next Festival and give some informal feedback. The development of the evaluation partnership with Ruth Melville Research offered a chance to take this further as we have extensive experience of supporting community researchers. It was felt important not to simply ask them to collect surveys (as is often done by community research teams) but to take significant steps forward in terms of their role within the evaluation and bringing community voice to the programme:

- The training and use of an ethnographic approach to observation, including recording and analysis of this data
- Their involvement in the design of the research questions and the data collection approaches, as well as the analysis and sharing of findings

In both cases, this was a process which developed over time with trial and error, in particular in the need to balance the wish to empower a community voice within the evaluation process with the time restrictions the volunteers have and a wish not to overburden them.

The initial group of keen volunteers was recruited from among the Hull 2017 volunteers and had received survey data collection training from the 2017 evaluation team. They were mainly retired or semi-retired, and as 2017 volunteers they had a lot of experience of the arts, and although none are from a specifically arts background, tended to be comfortable with engaging with art – certainly after their experiences in 2017. As the model progressed, the group was widened and diversified to include a further cohort recruited via the Hubs who began training and work in May 2019. As a result, at the end of Phase 1 there is a team of around 10 regular volunteers from a range of backgrounds and interests. The team is managed and supported by the monitoring and evaluation officer of Back to Ours, so that the admin they need to do is minimised.

In order to make the opportunity as open as possible, there was no requirement for prior experience in participant observation, or minimal level of literacy. All that is required (considered within recruitment) is that they have an enthusiasm for critical questioning and asking 'why' something might happen, as well as being willing to question their own preconceptions. They received training from Ruth Melville in observation techniques, critical questioning and self-reflection and qualitative analysis, all delivered through a mentoring approach alongside actually doing the work and analysing findings. In addition there was training on critical thinking skills, and understanding how to assess audiences responses to artistic quality from Prof Franco Bianchini at University of Hull.

As the model progressed they have a planned set of visits to other places to test out techniques and meet and learn from other community research teams. In Oct 2018 the first one was to LeftCoast, Blackpool CPP, involving a meeting with several of the projects and an observation at a performance. They have already received requests from two other CPPs to come and share learning on their approach there.



The approach taken is called 'chatting' – hence the 'Chat to Ours' title – and in practice it is a form of participant observation where the volunteers chat to audience members as they come into an event, leave an event, and also watch during the show. Different observation approaches have been used and a more 'participant' approach seems to work best in terms of not feeling uncomfortable for the audiences, so in general the Chat to Ours team observe while doing general volunteering activities, taking notes afterwards.

Part of their work includes an analysis session for each event or festival, which allows them to be fully part of the thematic analysis. In agreement with the group, an external writer was brought in to write up their research to reduce pressure on them. These reports are presented internally to the Back to Ours team (in a session with all team members and all Chat to Ours) and their observation, analysis and feedback has proved incredibly valuable for the Back to Ours team

This report is very much owned by Chat to Ours, and a 'highlights' report – agreed by the Chat to Ours team is included as [Appendix 4](#) of this report to give a sense of the level and value of the work undertaken..

Challenges have included identifying the research questions for their work and communication between the Chat to Ours team and the rest of Back to Ours. These arise partly from the informal and intuitive approach of Back to Ours, which mean that developing the research questions – which would need to happen between those developing the programming (Director, Festival lead etc) and the Chat to Ours team – would within the Back to Ours model happen through a series of semi-information conversations or team meetings. This is certainly how the team itself works. This is not as easy with a set of volunteers, and the intensity of preparation needed in the run up to the Festivals means there hasn't always been the time for sharing and discussion. Feedback from the Chat to Ours team to the Festival organisers on the night has been useful, as well as ad hoc in person exchanges which happen particularly between the Director and the Chat to Ours volunteers – all of whom she knows well and has an excellent relationship with. These have undoubtedly shaped programming, both in terms of immediate factors – front of house, announcements, seating and timing – and longer term in terms of venue use and planning, understanding barriers for audiences and what particularly works in terms of overcoming these. There would be a value in making space for this to happen more, which will require more formally arranged sharing sessions, and this is being put in place for the May 2019 Festival.

It is clear that the Chat to Ours model, which very much fits the Back to Ours approach to community voice, is a real asset to Back to Ours, and has potential for use further afield. The current team have been praised for their skills by Prof Bianchini:

It is apparent that the CTO members are highly articulate and capable when engaging with members of the public. They are friendly and approachable; they practice active listening skills and are considerate in their observational tasks, remaining discreet and objective always. The quality of their working practices is to be commended. There is little to offer in response to the highly developed skills already in place, other than to never be complacent and to keep thinking and talking about these skills and practices, to try to improve further. A systematic and iterative process of self-evaluation and peer reviewing should be established to build on already successful CTO activities.

*Feedback from training session*

Chat to Ours members already report very positive outcomes socially and artistically, feeling they've met new people, feel more involved in their local areas, have more social interaction and new experiences including reaching and getting to know a wider range of people:

'I have met new people because of Back to Ours and appreciate their point of view'

'...as a result of Back to Ours I've been more involved in different areas e.g. Bransholme and enjoyed meeting the people who live there ...

"I have a condition called ME/CFS and I was pretty much house bound for a lot of years, and unable to work. As I have started to feel well in myself due to vitamin b tablets, I have also been able to





get out and about more. Volunteering for chat to ours has made me realise that I am not useless, and that a may one day be able to work full time again.”

*Chat to Ours member, Survey*

They also have gained in artistic confidence:

[I will now] tackle more diverse art forms - taken part in art forms I don't particularly understand but asked myself "is it important?" answer no!

*Chat to Ours member, Survey*

Finally, it is clear from their responses to the evaluation team, to the CPPI team at the university, and from the survey that their understanding of and respect for monitoring and evaluation has increased. This is evident in the level of challenge and self-reflection they put into their reports and feedback, and is reiterated in an unprompted comment in the survey:

I'm now hugely aware of the role solid monitoring and evaluation can have in terms of continued success and potential failure.

*Chat to Ours member, Survey*

With the development of the wider membership of the team, there is potential to use a range of ethnographic techniques to explore more of the issues that arts engagement faces, for example understanding the wishes and opportunities, and the community assets within the focus areas, through discussions with local people and observation at various community events. At the same time, it provides a lens through which the model of engagement and community voice which is at the heart of Back to Ours can be assessed.

### 4.3. Everyone back to ours - the brand

A City of Culture as a brand will inevitably be big and high impact, perhaps in terms of visual appeal, but certainly values and aspirations. After all, there is a massive investment (political, economic, artistic) in anywhere achieving City of Culture status and an expectation of benefits and legacies, and Hull was generally no different in this respect.

The Back to Ours brand developed and started the process of moving away from the City of Culture and developing its own identity in 2018. This was about *how things are done* rather than what is put on or the scale of an event.

There is a very conscious move to include the people of Hull:

“At the very core of Back to Ours is people. We want YOU to take the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in amazing art experiences, as participants, decision-makers, artists, volunteers and, of course, audiences.”<sup>43</sup>

The name “Back to Ours”, is immediately friendly and informal. “Everyone back to ours” might be what you say to friends at the end of a night out – it’s an invitation to come round – to somewhere that’s “home” and by implication, local.

This friendly informality can be seen in the visual brand itself, in that it’s no nonsense. And in the extension of the brand into ‘Snack to Ours’ (refreshments at events) and ‘Chat to Ours’ (volunteers observing events where ‘chatting’ is part of the methodology) continue the sense of shared ownership (*Ours*).

<sup>43</sup> Back to Ours website, <http://www.backtoours.co.uk/whats-back-to-ours/>



Figure 19: Hero Image for Back to Ours



The “hero image” of people on a bus again perfectly reflects this. Lots of different people heading somewhere (a show perhaps) with all sorts of things going on. The “everydayness” of a bus journey transformed into something exciting but still real. The key image is of real people not a spectacular show or performers. One of the activities carried out with the Hubs to review the October 2018 Festival used the hero image as a way of getting feedback. People were asked “Is there something in this Festival for everyone on the bus? Who would go to each show and what would they get from it?”

Everyday language and situations are used to create a brand that matches the model of art as an everyday pursuit. Everyone is welcome.

It is possible to see the Back to Ours brand reflected in the programming, particularly perhaps when the Secret Gigs feature well-loved entertainers such as Cannon & Ball or Jimmy Cricket or the large gigs feature 1990’s bands such as Ash or Shed Seven. However, there’s an interesting tension set up when less “everyday” programming occurs, and audiences are challenged.

From the staff interviews, the fact that at points aspects of the marketing has been considered “too professional” shows that perhaps the values of “everydayness” could be extended further. It may be that the aims (expressed on the website) need to be complimented by a set of (brand) values written down, that then explicitly inform everything that Back to Ours does. However other aspects of the current marketing, such as hyperlocal flyer-ing and knocking on doors does appear to be very “on brand”.

Being a CPP, trying to reach the non-arts engagers, requires a brand and values that are more grounded than the City of Culture “spectacle” – that doesn’t build barriers between people and “art and culture” – that speaks to them in ways that resonates.

“this is the ethos for Back to Ours, we are a bit of a family, we’re a family with an agenda which is to get people involved in the arts”

*Back to Ours Director*



It's interesting that the internal expression of the brand, that is the core 'value' for staff when thinking about Back to Ours is "Does it make you happy?" The idea being if staff aren't enjoying what they are delivering, then how could there be an expectation that audiences would enjoy attending or participating. This view affects all aspects of programming, with the Director adamant that even with a big show like Back to Bransholme everyone involved should have a positive and welcomed time – which was echoed in the feedback from participants and artists.

Moving into Phase 2, this approach remains at the heart of programming and communicating. The continuation of the 'Secret Gigs' at local clubs, the development and continuation of the Back to Ours 'Shindig' events – a fun, relaxed night out, and the 'Doos' which give a sense of welcoming and non-challenging party atmosphere allowing the gradual inclusion of more traditional programming, for example through the early 2020 collaboration with Hull Truck's production of *Two*, to be marketed through the 'Two-Doo' in local pubs and social clubs.

## 4.4. Action learning

Action Learning is one of the key principles of CPP, and is very much a part of how the team want to operate. As such, the Back to Ours evaluation is designed not as a standalone external assessment, but as part of an embedded approach to action learning which threads throughout the programme. For this reason rather than placing discussion of the evaluation in a fixed methodology section alone, this report reflect on the evaluation itself, and explores the benefits and challenges.

The evaluation came about through an action learning approach in itself, with Ruth Melville initially taking the role of Critical Friend – a role required within Phase 1 of CPPs to support the evaluation and challenge to the programme, to ensure that they aren't just about delivering, but about risk taking, exploring new approaches, and learning from experience.

Initial discussions with the team led to the realisation that there was a need for a radical rethink on evaluation and monitoring approaches within Back to Ours as they were moving from an intense, single year of activity focussed on outputs, to a longer more intense and embedded approach to programming, where learning was more important than simply knowing numbers: from 'whether it worked' to 'why it worked (or didn't)' and in particular from what was inevitably a summative evaluation – despite all the intentions of a very able Hull 2017 evaluation team, the timescales meant there wasn't time for feedback to be able to really inform programming – to a formative evaluation.

The Hull 2017 evaluation had been heavy on quantitative data collection, and this had at times meant data collection got in the way of programming itself – for example with overly enthusiastic volunteers holding people up from entering an event while they collected monitoring data. Furthermore, the analysis reports took so much time to write up that they weren't available even to inform most of Back to Ours 2018 programming, nearly a year after the event. This is all very normal for a major event, and is not a criticism of the approach taken for the year, however it was clearly not appropriate for Back to Ours CPP.

It was decided that the evaluation should be as much as possible embedded in the day to day operation of Back to Ours, with data collection, and more importantly reflection and analysis done in house as the work progressed. As such, particularly given the timescale and challenges of getting an external evaluation up and running, it was decided that the external evaluation should be more of a quality check and summative role, rather than carrying out the full evaluation. The evaluator would support reflection, oversee data collection and internal work, and then collate learning in two reports, this being the final one. Following discussion with the Director, Steering Group and Arts Council as the main funder, Ruth Melville agreed to take on this role.

The evaluation model is centred on a series of reflection sessions (initially planned to be quarterly) with Ruth, partnered with support in ensuring an appropriate (but not overpowering) level of monitoring and audience feedback data was collected through an appropriate sampling approach. Also qualitative data collection on audience experience (much more appropriate to exploring engagement than simply questionnaires) which was developed through the Chat to Ours community research team. This core approach of reflection, Chatting and appropriate monitoring is coupled with both internal work – e.g. the evaluation of the commissions was through a reflective process of their own, developing then regularly reflecting on Stories of Change, and



external research, e.g. the Culture, Place and Policy Institute (CPPI) at the University of Hull was commissioned to carry out research on the experience and outcomes of the Hubs approach (see [Appendix 3](#) for the final report). A part-time freelance post was created to act as Monitoring and Evaluation Co-ordinator and this has proved extremely useful in having time available to manage and support the Chat to Ours team, work on monitoring data collection, ensure models and approaches are implemented and put together audience data gathering. Surveys were created for commissioned artists, other partner artists, partner organisations, venue organisations, and questionnaires for participants explored outcomes of engagement.

This approach has worked in general:

- The level of embedding of thinking and reflection within the team's approach is high, with learning and adaptation happening instinctively and strategically.
- The enthusiasm of the team to work in this way is notable, they welcome the chance to admit what went wrong and try and change it.
- The outcomes of the reflection process are a stronger team, with more confidence in how to programme to get the best out of the opportunities, the venues and relationships with partners and community.
- Chat to Ours though costly in terms of time input needed to develop and support it is proving extremely useful and having positive outcomes for members as well as data and analysis for programming.
- The Story of Change approach worked in terms of drawing ideas out, and within workshops the buy in is good and committed, however this approach requires a level of time and focus which is hard to gain alongside the challenges of programming, thus more support is needed in order that this process is as useful as it can be.
- Several of the commissions have really relished the chance to reflect on their learning and feel able to comment on outcomes, particularly for themselves. Many, however do not think in this way and need a lot of support to develop their Stories of Change.
- Although the team undoubtedly did carry out an action research approach to planning – plan, do, review, plan – they were also programming at an intense rate, and in addition, coming from a culture of delivery-led approach – needed for UKCC work – they didn't have a culture of making time within the planning cycle to stop and reflect. The volume of the work produced – partly a result of the need to deliver three years of programming into two years, and partly due to the enthusiasm and commitment of the team further exacerbated this.
- The team do recognise this need, and have increased reflection time over the course of Phase 1, however there is a need for recognition, particularly from funders, of the amount of time needed to take a fully action learning approach and to lower targets and expectations accordingly.

As a result of this learning, the evaluation model for Phase 2 will continue with slight adaptations to include more admin support for monitoring, more regular input from the evaluator and a locally based member of the external evaluation team, while keeping the strengths, particularly including Chat to Ours and the reflective approach to programming and marketing.

## 4.5. Making a difference to Hull's communities

Beyond the core Creative People and Places aims of reaching new audiences through high quality arts, Back to Ours also aims to make a real difference to Hull's communities. During Phase 1 this was developed to focus on:

- Increased arts appetite and expectations of quality, feeling empowered within the arts process
- Pride in Hull and their neighbourhoods, sense of belonging and connection
- Feeling valued and increased confidence

These together would help increase wellbeing. Research was carried out by the CPPI at the University of Hull (see [Appendix 3](#)) to explore the process, experience and impact of the Hubs work on Hub members, alongside







All interviewees reflected on the collective experience that they had in Edinburgh (August 2019), not only because they went to see 6 or 7 high-quality shows in a short intensive experience, but the experience of travelling on the train together, making new friends with other Hub Members and coming back buzzing with ideas of how they could put on art events in their own neighbourhoods. There was a strong desire across all of the interviewees to be involved in programming and commissioning events for their own local areas based on what had been seen at the Edinburgh Festival, a favourite show which was mentioned by a number of Hub Members was Pamela's Palace (a comedy show at the Edinburgh Fringe 2019), the Hub Member from East Hull said it was interactive and fun, and could easily be put on in her neighbourhood.

The phrase "I've been to see things that I wouldn't normally go to see" was used a number of times. This showed that they had all been encouraged to try something new, and possibly out of their comfort zone. Because the experience was well planned and of high-quality, they enjoyed it, even if it wasn't something, they thought they would enjoy. An artist reflected that BTO had managed to retain the ethos of Hull2017, of encouraging audiences to try something new, this has reflected positively on the BTO team and their commitment to programming high-quality art.

Hub Members interviewed have developed a strong bond of loyalty to BTO and particularly Tony and Louise, this based on positive and safe experiences they have had on multiple occasions, this should not be underestimated, as provision of high-quality arts events is not always the experience that audiences and participants receive.

Showing an increased sense of agency and commitment to arts and culture, Hub Members also cited bringing their family and friends along to the BTO events, paying for tickets when they could get them for free from BTO, and all described with passion their desire to put on events in their own neighbourhoods. They describe wanting to share their positive experiences with others, through putting on events in their local neighbourhoods. One interviewee argues that:

"art needs to be promoted in schools more, it's not just about the poor kids, it should be about everyone." <sup>44</sup>

The involvement of Hub Members in the Brack to Bransholme show, via performing, stewarding, and collecting feedback from the audience, appears to have sparked an enthusiasm from Hub Members elsewhere in the city to see similar events in their own neighbourhoods.

One Hub Member described how she wanted to lobby BTO for more arts events to happen in her area. She has enlisted new Hub Members and hopes to ensure that her neighbourhood gets more arts events, as this has not been happening recently.

This, coupled with the sense of altruism in their involvement with the Hub groups, mean that there is a real potential for these groups to take the lead in programming in Phase 2 which Back to Ours intends.

#### 4.5.2. Pride in Hull and their neighbourhoods, sense of belonging and connection

92% of Hub members either strongly agreed (65%) or agreed (27%) with the statement "I am proud to live in Hull", showing that the overwhelming majority of Hub Members felt a strong sense of pride in the place where they lived and wanted to bring BTO events into their neighbourhoods.

A generalised sense of pride in Hull was less evident from the face to face interviews undertaken with Hub Members by CPPI researchers, but pride in their local neighbourhoods was strong. There is an enthusiasm to celebrate and engage their local areas, either through bringing exciting art events to their area, or in filling a bus with their friends and family for a Go See visit to the Back to Bransholme event.

<sup>44</sup> Taken from CPPI Hubs research report, see Appendix 4 for further details





People who took part in Back to Bransholme described Bransholme as a place with a friendly community, albeit with something of a bad reputation and which could get ignored.

*'An area where people don't have much money but have a community that are close knit.'*

*'Tart with a heart. It's the dirt under the fingernails which I like about Bransholme.'*

*Participant Survey*

Over half said the best thing about it was the community and the people, and the shopping centre was also mentioned positively.

*'The community, everybody is bloody lovely.'*

*Participant Survey*

They said that if they could change one thing, it would be the reputation and the bad press the estate gets – and 'other people's views'. About half of the people said their opinion of Bransholme had changed for the better since becoming involved with Back to Bransholme, while about half said there was no change in their views.

*"I still Love the place immensely , but slightly more now !!"*

*"Majorly. Once I thought it was an intimidating place. Now I see it as a cornerstone of Hull."*

*"no change, I already know it's a great place."*

*Participant Surveys*

### 4.5.3. Feeling valued and increased confidence

*'Helping the fantastic Back to Ours team achieve their aims while feeling valued by them.'*

*Participant Survey response*

Building individual Hub Members' confidence is a constant theme that has come through in nearly all interviews. Many Hub Members have openly reflected that they lack confidence, but report that BTO has helped them to regain their confidence, based on new experiences, the supportive approach of BTO and the social networks they have developed through attending cultural events.

Their sense of being valued arises directly out of the team's style of a personal approach, and giving clear value to their time input through e.g. free tickets, travel and snacks to enable them to take their families to see shows, and the way in which their ideas are so clearly fed immediately into the programming. Two Hub Members reflected that BTO is important because it's "their time" when they are allowed to enjoy themselves and do something special for them.

Being present is a key feature here - the Back to Ours team are all known by their first names, and all Hub Members interviewed were able to recall a moment when they had spoken with the team directly, spent time with them and shared experiences and ideas, either through the Go See activities or the Hub Meetings.

Hub Members also appreciate the peer support available via the Hubs. One Member said that "I find it hard to make friends, so when I went to the Fringe, I was worried I didn't know anyone, but as soon as I went on the train, we all clicked. It's nice that BTO say thank you, but it's more the other Hub Members being supportive, that's more important."



Experiencing the arts for the first time is supported through the Go See trips which were continually referred to as a reward/treat, or something that the Hub Members would not normally be able to do. A trip to London was referred by a number of Hub Members, who had been taken to see Cirque du Soleil, for one Hub Member this was the first time that they had been to London and been on the underground. This is a significant life experience that BTO has given to this Hub Member. Another Hub Member was given the responsibility of taking the group to London and this too, was an important experience for them.

People who had taken part in Back to Bransholme said they had experienced a strong increase in self-esteem and confidence, with one saying that:

*'Working with such happy, positive people has had an impact on myself. Feeling more confident and made many new friends.'*

*'Before 2017 I was shy. I become volunteer for COC did not look back. Back to ours help to push me to try new things.'*

*Participant Surveys*

Participants in Back to Bransholme also felt more confident to perform and try new things:

*'This is the first time I've had a speaking role in front of the public and I loved it. I've now got involved in pantomime and being a character in murder mystery events in my local area. It's boosted my confidence.'*

*Participant Surveys*



## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

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Back to Ours has succeeded in meeting the Creative People and Places aims of reaching new audiences among those least likely to engage with the arts, and providing a high quality experience that audiences have appreciated and wanted to connect with again. In terms of Back to Ours' approach and learning, there is an exciting delivery and evaluation model, parts of which are specific, or even unique among CPPs, or certainly haven't been widely explored before.

At the end of Phase 1, Back to Ours have only been fully delivering for under two years, and are at the start of at least another three years of delivery, with a strong case for extension beyond, given this impressive start. Our conclusions reflect both what has been achieved, and likely longer term impacts into Phase 2 and beyond.

### 5.1. Conclusions

In terms of ACE National CPP Research question 1: reaching new audiences, we find that:

- The 'reach' of the whole Back to Ours programme goes well beyond Hull, spreading both to the surrounding East Riding and nationally for many events.
- Within Hull there is a good spread across the different areas, including the Hub and low engagement target areas (45% of engagers came from HU5, 6 and 7 postcodes).
- Back to Ours is reaching those less likely to engage in the arts, 45% of audiences said they'd not engaged in the arts in the last year, 90% came from typically low or medium engaging groups, 90% came from medium or low engaging groups, with reach to the lowest engaging groups rising between 2018 and 2019.
- Back to Ours is engaging people from more deprived and lower socio-economic groups, particularly in the target Hub areas, where over two thirds of audiences come from the 10% most deprived in England. Over the whole audience, one third are from lower socio-economic groups DE, who tend to be far less likely to engage in the arts.
- There are still some steps to be taken to ensure that lower engaging groups from across the city are as widely represented as they are in the city's population.
- Back to Ours is engaging people from BAME communities (10% of the audience in Phase 1), which is in proportion with the city population but below Business Plan targets. This is likely to be related to the fact that the areas targeted for Phase 1 predominantly have White British populations. It shows there is still more work to do in reaching wider communities and monitoring this.
- Back to Ours audiences love the shows, and they are very good at inspiring continued attendance: those who attend Back to Ours events are very likely to be inspired to engage further.
- Back to Ours has put in place a number of different approaches to engaging diverse communities and those least likely to engage in the arts. They are taking a thoughtful action learning approach to removing barriers in terms of marketing, communications, front of house, ticketing and cultural confidence, all of which are likely to lead to engaging new audiences in the longer term.

In terms of ACE National CPP Research question 2, the aspiration for excellence of process and product of the art, we find that:

- There is a commitment to excellence of process and product which forms the backbone of all Back to Ours programming.
- This is particularly ensured through the internal challenge, and space for external challenge which the team build in, meaning that Back to Ours is truly embedding an action learning philosophy into understanding and ensuring quality.
- The artistic vision includes: Challenging, excellent and resonant work; Co-developed and produced with local people and participants; Located in everyday places; and great fun to be part of.



- Partnering with arts organisations like Casus and Cluster Arts supports audiences across the city to engage with international quality work.
- Audience and participants are captivated and enthused by the work and see it as high quality.
- The challenge for Phase 2 in terms of assessing excellence needs to move from feeling the need to justify it as high quality work, to exploring what impact the quality itself has on participants and audiences.
- Back to Ours is clearly committed to a genuine and empowering approach to engagement. Community voice in the programme is ensured through the mechanism of the Hubs – resident focused groups operating in the target estates – and the approach of involving them in an informal and accessible conversation about the programme. This has developed into a distinctive and genuine collaboration, however the level of time and skill needed to achieve this should be recognised and shared.
- Through the commissions, Back to Ours has developed the capacity of the local sector in terms of partnership working with local communities and offering a space for them to explore more ambitious projects than previous funding has allowed. There is clearly a need for more support to develop local artists so they can deliver work locally and engage further with Hull communities. Back to Ours can play a partial role in this, through the Hubs commissioning process, but the responsibility cannot rest with them alone and this should be delivered in partnership with the rest of the cultural sector.

In terms of ACE National Research Question 3: what approaches particularly work, we find that:

- Back to Ours is built around programming unexpected events and combinations in unusual venues. This has been a very effective approach to build local partnership, particularly reaching beyond the arts, and to develop skills and capacity which will broaden the range of programming venues in the city.
- This arose both from the warm, inclusive and capacity-building style of the team, who are good at recognising assets others have missed, and from the whole-hearted way in which programming partners have responded to the opportunity, showing the level of interest and appetite for this work across the city.
- Back to Ours has a strong commitment to ensuring community voice shapes the programme in all aspects, going well beyond the Hubs strand. This is approached through an explicitly informal route, drawing on interpersonal skills, relationships and a sense of creating a conversation around what works and what is needed from which the programming is developed.
- This can be an incredibly effective and empowering approach, but it takes time, and relies on the intention and skills of a very experienced and committed team. It is currently carried out in an intuitive way, which should be shared through explicit partnering with other organisations, or through further discussion and articulation.
- The brand of Back to Ours works well with audiences to give a sense of safety and to help them take steps into new experiences. The brand highlights these approaches, the inclusion, shared journey, the everyday nature of arts and culture, and the warm welcome. This is a great basis for others to begin to understand and take on board the practice around programming and community voice more clearly.
- Back to Ours is having an impact on Hull's communities, particularly in the Hub neighbourhoods in terms of increased arts appetite and cultural confidence, in terms of sense of belonging and pride in their areas, and sense of value and confidence to try new things.
- The team and programme embody action learning in their whole approach, allowing them to adapt and change the programme on a regular basis and try out new approaches. The evaluation approach, particularly the Chat to Ours team, and the embedding of reflective thinking for members of the team tie in well to this. This explicit embedding of reflective evaluation within programming will deepen in Phase 2.
- As Back to Ours moves into Phase 2, a new business plan has been developed which focuses more clearly on working with and through the Hubs and targeting commissions and major delivery carefully. We welcome this and feel it aligns well with the findings of this report.



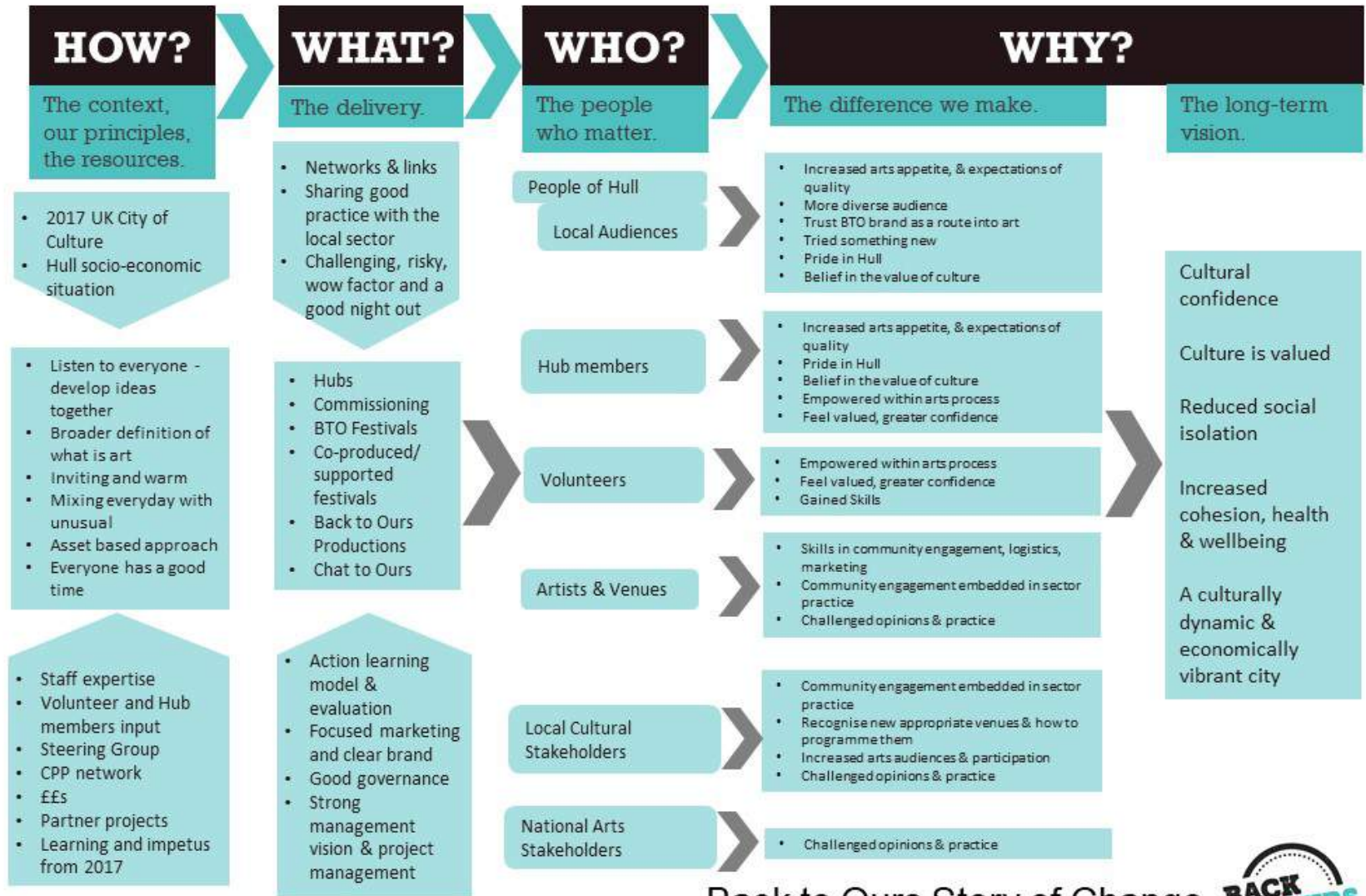
## 5.2. Recommendations

As Back to Ours moves into Phase 2 we would recommend they:

- Build on the success of the targeting of 'Hub areas' by socio-economic profiling data to identify further areas of low engagement and/or socio-economic disadvantage for targeted programming and marketing.
- Are clear about other target audiences, particularly in terms of those least to engage in the arts and BAME communities and make realistic targets and appropriate programming decisions in order to meet them.
- Celebrate success in reaching and enthusing huge numbers of people who are new to the arts, and share learning with other areas and with organisations across the city. This should include learning on what didn't work as well as successes to maintain trust and give a more balanced view: sharing this report in an accessible and broad way, using a Back to Ours style event and delivery would be an ideal start.
- Continue the new model of delivery, with work planned around Hub suggestions and partnership opportunities, rather than a commitment to deliver a regular Festival.
- Continue the extremely successful approach to marketing, ticketing and event welcome which seems to be vital in engaging new audiences.
- Recognise, evidence and share the amount of time and resources needed to take such an embedded (and successful) approach to marketing. Develop case studies to demonstrate true cost and value using Treasury Green Book approved methods.
- Continue to build in time and space for reflection and implementation of learning throughout the programme. This should include Hub members, artists and stakeholders, at key points throughout the programme, continuing dialogue and joint learning with the wider CPP network and exploring emerging models of engagement.
- Look for ways to share the learning around Back to Ours' success in engaging and empowering communities within the process. As this is based so much on expertise, instinctive approaches and iterative learning, this might be better done through working with partners to deliver a project (learning through experience) than a dry explanation.
- Continue to expand the strong community voice in the programme, particularly through the Hubs, the work with venue partners and the Chat to Ours team's input to the evaluation.
- Continue the models of event and participant data collection, mixing quantitative data collection which doesn't interfere with the audience experience, with the chatting and observing approach of Chat to Ours to explore experience in more depth.
- Explore ways to develop some of the successful elements of the programme further, Further building on the gains of the programme so far – for example, the venue network, Chat to Ours etc. This has been done effectively in Bransholme with the Living Room three year project funded under NCLF.

Ruth Melville, Feb 2020

# Appendix 1: Back to Ours Story of Change







## Appendix 2: Methodology

This report is based on work carried out by a number of different researchers, the Chat to Ours volunteer research team and the Back to Ours team, all developed and analysed within an evaluation approach developed by Ruth Melville in discussion with the Back to Ours team and Steering Group.

The framework takes into account the National Evaluation Research Questions developed for CPP by Arts Council England at the start of the programme in 2012 and not changed since:

1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?
2. To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
3. Which approaches were successful and what were the lessons learned?

It draws on the monitoring and reflection required within the ACE Quarterly monitoring and reporting model, which asks for figures on activities, attendances, delivery, and geographic and demographic reach, as well as whether CPPs are reaching people new to the arts. The monitoring framework was in place when the evaluation started, but some minor adaptations have been made to make it deliver more clearly to the evaluation requirements.

The evaluation is partially embedded in the programme, with an evaluation framework developed by Dr Ruth Melville from Ruth Melville Research, and data collection carried out partly by the Back to Ours team and volunteers – including Chat to Ours, by Dr Pip Gardner, and by Prof Franco Bianchini and Vickie Bissett from the CPPI at the University of Hull, analysis of postcodes by The Audience Agency and by Helen Corkery, as well as by Ruth Melville Research team including Ben Morgan, Catherine Doran, Charlotte Eade and Rebecca Ranson.

Data gathering included:

**Audience Surveys:** carried out at most audience events, using a mix of paper questionnaires, postcards, online surveys – at ticket buying or post event and administered by volunteers.

**Artist and Participant Surveys:** carried out in 2019 online by Ruth Melville Research with commissioned artists, other artists who work with Back to Ours, art partners, venue managers, participants in a range of programmes and Hub members

**Interviews and Focus groups:** carried out formally by Dr Pip Gardner and Vickie Bissett with the staff team, and informally by Ruth Melville with staff team, partners, Chat to Ours

**Observation:** extensive data gathering has been carried out through observation and participant observation at team meetings, Steering Group meetings, events and Hub meetings. This was carried out by Ruth Melville, Chat to Ours and the CPPI.

**Story of Change sessions:** the Story of Change approach is a way of looking holistically at a project, taking into account what the outcomes and stakeholders are: who you want to make a difference to, why – what's the difference you are trying to make, as well as principles and approaches – 'how' you'll do it, before thinking about 'what' you are planning to do. This approach is helpful for avoiding programmes rushing into action, giving a chance to stop and reflect on why they are doing what they do, but also is helpful for developing an evaluation framework as the 'why' elements form the basis of what difference is intended and thus should be measured. Back to Ours' Story of Change is constantly evolving – see Appendix 1 above for end of Phase 1 model, and will change throughout the course of the programme as they reflect and learn and adapt what they intend. As a result of the initial workshop with staff, it was decided there was a value in getting some of the commissioned artists to complete a Story of Change for their commission, and these were also supported by Ruth Melville Research and form the basis for exploring the outcomes of the commissions.

**Analysis** was carried out within the various projects, in particular Chat to Ours have been supported to develop skills in analysing qualitative and ethnographic data and have shared their learning with the rest of Back to Ours through discussions and reports. Ruth Melville Research have pulled all the learning together and carried out analysis across the programme for 20118-2019.



**Postcode Analysis** was carried out to determine the reach of the audience. Postcodes were collected from a sample of over 7,000 audiences attending 73 of the 82 events delivered and 6,745 of these postcodes were matched and used in the analysis (separately) by Helen Corkery and The Audience Agency.

<b>Table 1: Sample breakdown</b>		<b>Postcodes collected</b>	<b>Matched postcodes</b>	<b>Total audience (events at which data collected)</b>	<b>Margin of error @ 95% (+/-%)</b>
<b>Year</b>	2018	3,436	3,312	66,625	1.7
	2019	3,671	3,433	240,172	1.7
	2-year total	7,107	6,745	306,797	1.2

## Appendix 3: CPPI Hubs Report

## Appendix 4: Chat to Ours Report

# BACK TO OURS HUBS REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF HULL, CULTURE, PLACE AND POLICY INSTITUTE

VICKIE BISSETT AND PROFESSOR FRANCO BIANCHINI

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# THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Culture, Place and Policy Institute (CPPI) at the University of Hull was commissioned in January 2019 by the Back to Ours (BTO) team to complete a two-phase research project examining the BTO Hub groups over a 12-month period and concluding in January 2020.

BTO has now established four key Hub groups, based in the Bransholme area, Derringham ward, East Hull area and North Hull areas, all of which are within the Hull city boundary.

BTO is currently the key arts organisation in Hull developing an estate-based approach to arts engagement work. The Hubs are a direct link into local neighbourhoods and the key mechanism for connecting a high-quality arts programming with Hull residents in a democratic way. BTO describe the Hubs as being at the heart of the organisation and its ambitions for the future.

The CPPI team include Vickie Bissett - CPPI Research Assistant and Prof. Franco Bianchini - CPPI Director. They developed and delivered a structured series of meetings, interviews, observations, attendance at Hub-related arts events, background research, all of which is featured in the production of two reports, the first report presented in March 2019 and this the second report in January 2020 (see Appendix 1 for an overview of activities undertaken).

The interviews have provided the CPPI team with an insight into the work of the Hubs, their philosophy and future plans. This report and research were undertaken during the final year of BTO's initial two-year funding contract with Arts Council England.

BTO was designed as a transformational action research programme, with an experimental approach to programming and community engagement practices to establish a new model of delivery, specific BTO. There are now four functioning Hubs, including the Derringham Hub, the East Hull Hub, North Hull Hub, and the Bransholme Hub. Bransholme is currently the only area which has a Hub space. This is called the Living Room and is a space for Hub members and the residents to come together to chat, take part in creative activities and is based at the North Point Shopping Centre, Bransholme. The Living Room received £295k from the National Lottery Community Fund in September 2019 for a three-year programme of activities to tackle issues around social isolation. BTO has also secured funding from Esmee Fairbairn, and a new three-year funding agreement for a phase two programme of BTO with the Arts Council England, beginning in 2020.

Interviews with the Hub members and artists working with the Hubs has provided an overwhelmingly positive picture, based on Hub Members reporting increased levels of cultural confidence, a sense of inclusion within the BTO family and tangible new life experiences gained through BTO. Six Hub Members were interviewed between March and December 2019, one from the Derringham ward, two from East Hull and three from North Hull, unfortunately we did not speak with a representative from the Bransholme area.

Three Pan Hub meetings were observed (see Appendix 2 for notes) during 2019, and previously as part of the Chat to Ours evaluation a number of area Hub meetings were attended during late 2018. The Community Engagement Manager has experimented with different models of bringing the Hub members together, such as area focused Hub meetings, and during 2019 three Pan Hub meetings were delivered, according to feedback from Hub members the Pan Hub meetings are preferred as they offer a social event as well as opportunities for information sharing.

## 2. HULL CONTEXT

# THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

The background data used to develop an understanding of a Hull context in which BTO is operating, has been drawn from a number of sources including; the *Arts and Culture Profiles* report (2013) by Hull City Council, the *Citywide Residents Survey (2019)* by Information by Design, *The Hull Cultural Compact bid (2019)* document, and *Hull's City Plan 2013-2023 (2013)*.

The *Arts and Culture Profiles* report (2013) is a segmentation data report which includes socio-demographic statistics from the 2011 census, behaviour and attitude data from Hull City Council's people's panel, and transactional data provided by arts and cultural venues. The *Citywide Residents Survey (2019)* was collected from over 3,000 Hull and East Riding residents during 2018 and compares findings with previous surveys in 2017 and 2016.

Adjustments to Hull's ward boundaries in 2018 by Hull City Council, created 7 Area Committees, with 3 wards each, this has affected the names of some of the wards, for example Bransholme East and West are now identified by Hull City Council as now North Carr and West Carr respectively, but locally are still referred to as Bransholme (see Appendix 4).

The BTO Hubs cover 4 areas in the city of Hull, some of which are generalised areas which include more than one ward (see Appendix 5 for the local and national rankings of Hull's Deprived Wards in 2018). Here is a breakdown of the generalised areas and actual wards that are included.

- **Derringham ward** (only includes Derringham and ranks 18/23 in Hull deprived wards)
- **North Hull area** (includes the Orchard Park Estate and Greenwood Avenue wards. Orchard Park is Hull's most deprived ward 1/23 and ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in the national table of multiple deprivation of wards in England)
- **Bransholme area** (includes Bransholme East and West, Kings Park and Sutton wards). Bransholme East and West are 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> in the local rankings and 37<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> in the national rankings, out of 7529 wards in England.
- **East Hull area** (includes Longhill, Holderness, Southcoates East and West and Marfleet wards). Marfleet, Southcoates East and Longhill all feature in Hull's top 10 most deprived wards.

The areas and wards of Hull that BTO have chosen to focus on appear to be mixed in their demographic breakdown and in the patterns of cultural engagement undertaken by residents. The information below highlights some of the key findings relevant to BTO and are derived from the Arts and Culture profile segmentation model. Segments C, D and E appear to be the most significant area of interest for BTO activities and Hub group activities.

**Derringham** – Only 7% of residents that reside in the Derringham Bank neighbourhood are considered to have low levels of engagement with the arts and culture (segment D). The vast majority of this ward, over 80%, are relatively economically secure, and fit into segments F and H. This has been measured by the purchase of tickets for events such as the Freedom Festival and venues such as Hull Truck.

Despite the relatively healthy economic status of Derringham residents it is apparent that they are under-provided for in terms of access to statutory and voluntary facilities and services. The Fred Moore Library and the Garrowby Orchard Project are two organisations that BTO has connected with in the area. It is worth noting there is little in the way of statutory youth and voluntary sector provision locally, which may hinder the development of the Derringham Hub and its activities.

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**The Longhill area in East Hull** – 61% of this ward are classed as “low income families in public rented and owner occupier houses” (segment D) and are located in the Longhill and Bilton Grange neighbourhoods.

The Marfleet, Southcoates East and Longhill areas all have experienced periods of investment via community development work and urban regeneration schemes, the most significant being the Preston Road New Deal for Communities (PRNDC) programme, created by local MP John Prescott. The PRNDC was launched in 1999 and provided £55 million for an urban regeneration programme in the Preston Road area of East Hull over a 12-year period. The Freedom Centre and associated services such as Preston Road Women’s Centre and Child Dynamix remain today as the most significant legacy of the PRNDC programme.

Longhill and Southcoates East have a number of small but significant voluntary sector agencies working in the area, such as Probe (an employment and training organisation) local churches, health centres and community groups such as the Community Farm. This provides an established network of organisations to connect with, but this can come with its own problems of breaking through local gatekeepers, or entrenched community engagement practices.

**The Orchard Park area in North Hull** – 86% of this ward are “young families with dependent children in public rented houses” and are mostly in the Orchard Park and Greenwood neighbourhoods. Orchard Park is part of Segment C, along with Bransholme East and Marfleet. This segment would appear to include many of the most deprived wards in Hull and is potentially a neighbourhood for deep engagement work.

This area of Hull has also experienced previous programmes of urban regeneration, such as the North Hull HAT programme in the 1990s. Unity in the Community is a small to medium local charity and is also the legacy of the North Hull Housing Association Trust (HAT), a local arts organisation - Artlink had an artist in residence based at Unity in the Community offices from 1998-2003, this is referenced later in the case studies (see Section 5). There are long-established and trusted voluntary sector organisations operating in the area, including the St Mike’s Youth Project, recently celebrating 30 years of working in North Hull and the Rainbow Garden, to name a few. Again, this brings opportunities and issues for the development of new neighbourhood programmes, such as BTO.

**Bransholme East and West** – (renamed North Carr and West Carr respectively in 2018) both feature in Segments C and D of the profile and consist of “young families with dependent children in rented houses” and “low income families in rented and owner occupier houses”. These two groups account for a large proportion of Hull’s social groups characterised by low income and low engagement in arts and cultural activities.

Bransholme is a unique place within Hull in many ways, it was designed to accommodate Hessle Road residents who were moved as part of the “slum” clearances of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Residents have suffered from the stigmatisation of negative press coverage, practical issues of poor housing and isolation due to its geographic location on the edge of the city boundary (Featherstone, 2013). The Bransholme area of Hull has also experienced periods of community development work through government programmes, such as the Sure Start programme, established to support pre-school children and their families in the 2000s by New Labour.

Based on a multiple index of deprivation chart (see appendix 5) developed for the purpose of this report in March 2019, the BTO’s North Hull Hub which includes Orchard Park and Greenwood is



# THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

presently the most deprived area of Hull and is therefore presumably a key neighbourhood for the BTO programme. But this is closely followed by the Bransholme areas including Bransholme East, Bransholme West, and East Hull area including Marfleet, Southcoates East and Longhill.

A map of the geographic spread of the BTO Hub Members (see appendix 3) in December 2019, shows an even distribution of Hub Members across the Hub areas, and the recent planned reduction of Hub Members has not negatively impacted on the even distribution of Hub Members that continue to be part of the Hub network. This analysis shows some clustering and is likely to be attributable to family groups and friends who are live together or near to each other, highlighting the strong family and friendship bonds that already exist in the Hub members registered.

The comprehensive and organic approach that BTO is developing to neighbourhood engagement work, offers one of the few co-ordinated programmes of community engagement activity across the city of Hull, and is therefore complimentary to local government policy such as the Hull City Council City Centre Plan (2013) and the Hull Cultural Compact. The City Plan nods towards “Helping to build strong, active, empowered and engaged communities”, the Cultural Compact is not yet written, but is likely to include an acknowledgement of local neighborhoods and the importance of a cultural offer for the residents of Hull. In the current post-2017 landscape of Hull, BTO is a key organisation with an active group of residents, who if they are interested could be influential in local policy planning and change for the city of Hull.

## 3. THE JOURNEY AND THE PHILOSOPHY

The establishment of the Hubs began in 2018, shortly after the recruitment of Tony Forrester as the Community Engagement Manager. Tony began to develop the Hubs based on his previous working experiences at the Preston Road New Deal for Communities (PRNDC) for 17 years. Tony says that he wanted to replicate the community development work that he'd done in East Hull, but across the whole city of Hull.

Tony tapped into the established voluntary sector and community activists that he knew in East Hull to identify and recruit Hub Members for the first BTO Hub group. His collaborative approach of talking to people and establishing interventions which fit with the needs and wants of local groups has been productive in building trust, creating a new network, identifying Hub Members and potential art projects for the area. During 2018, Tony established meetings and conversations in North Hull, Derringham and the Bransholme areas of the city, settling on these four key areas in 2019 as the main Hub areas. These four Hub groups will now be taken forwards into the second phase of the BTO programme, which is funded by Arts Council from 2020-2022.

Tony has taken on board the philosophy and original concept developed by Louise Yates - BTO Director and conveyed her vision to the Hub Members. In March 2019 Louise said, “I wanted the Hubs to think about the people in their street, and what they want to see in their neighbourhoods. They know what will work in their area.”, and in interviews with the Hub Members the same language is used to describe their approach to programming through the Hub meetings. One Hub Member in North Hull said, “I always have her in my mind [her sister] when I'm looking a future programming.”.

Tony often refers to himself as a “middleman” and feels this is a necessary part of his role when relating to Hub Members and other stakeholders, he is also aware that he has other roles and responsibilities, such as co-ordinator, mediator, and even event compare! Tony's approach to the

## THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

development of his role and the Hubs has been an iterative process of review and learning, within the time constraints of the programme, he is constantly adapting and questioning his approach to the Hubs and this has been supported via the regular discussions with CPPI team. Tony's approach to arts development work is highly complementary and consistent with Louise's vision and style of Directing the BTO programme.

The second Hub was established in Bransholme. The North Point Shopping Centre staff were very involved and supportive of the BTO festivals during its formative year, when BTO was part of the Hull 2017 programme. The Shopping Centre wanted more of the same high-quality events going on in their space, as part of their programme of building a relationship with shoppers and local residents.

BTO identified Derringham as the third Hub area, but due to the lack of infrastructure, such as community facilities and events, Tony put the craft group We Made This into the Fred Moore Library to run regular craft sessions, as a means of attracting potential Hub Members and establishing what types of creative activities local residents would engage with, and to develop some arts programme for the neighbourhood.

The fourth Hub established was in the Orchard Park and North Hull Estate area. Tony worked with established groups such as St Mike's Youth Project and the Rainbow Garden, investing in the established organisations and drawing out the individuals who were interested to be involved in more creative activities. Tony placed commissioned artists into the neighbourhood, including Monster Extraction by My Pockets and Dom Heffer's Communication Station (which toured all the Hub areas) visited St Mike's Youth Centre in Orchard Park. BTO also invested in St Mike's, improving the performance space for future shows and events.

Tony has put resources and effort into establishing more Hubs, originally the plan was to create up to six, but at this point (December 2019) Tony has four well established and functioning Hub groups, with 57 members.

Tony says that he is aware that there are other deprived areas in the city, he highlighted Spring Bank, Beverley Road and Great Thornton Estate, as areas of interest, BTO also has a clear message that everyone is welcome to neighbourhood events, this ethos ensures that BTO is genuinely inclusive to all the right people. It should be noted that the Spring Bank, Beverley Road and Great Thornton St areas of the city are located near to the city centre and are the most ethnically diverse areas of Hull and should therefore be of interest to BTO. BTO has commissioned artists to work in these areas, but to ensure a genuinely inclusive engagement of neighbourhoods and residents, a plan or approach may need to be considered to reach ethnically diverse audiences and Hub Members.

To get the Hub groups established Tony held regular area meetings during 2018, putting on food and activities to engage residents and community representatives in discussions about what they want to happen in their neighbourhoods and to review the BTO festival shows. Then from May 2019, Tony experimented and brought Hub Members together at a central location for Pan Hub meetings, these events have been more focused on sharing information more widely with the Hub Members and bringing Hub Members and Artists together for a social event. Feedback from the Hub Members is that they enjoy the Pan Hub gatherings as a social event, because the event includes entertainment, with food and drinks, But one Artist reflected that the Pan Hub Events weren't as conducive to creating local connections for their project, as the Hub Members tended to stay in their established groups and didn't mingle with other people. This may not always be the case, but the area Hub Meetings are potentially a better mechanism for the artists to make

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direct contact, and for BTO to discuss and collect feedback for monitoring and evaluation purposes. It may be more productive to have Pan Hub gatherings once or twice a year, with area Hub meetings in-between to facilitate and broker conversations between artists and residents when setting up and running projects in a particular neighbourhood.

In March 2019 there were around 100 Hub Members registered, and after a process of managed reduction the Hub membership has reduced to 57 members (see Appendix 3 for new Hub Member Map). This process of reduction has planned and managed as a strategic process from July to December 2019 via communication at Hub meetings and direct correspondence with the Hub Members. The purpose of the reduction was to take forward a smaller group of committed members who could be who will be taken through a programme of support and creative and personal development from 2020 onwards.

In July 2019 Tony took on the responsibility of managing the Living Room as part of his role as Community Engagement Manager. The Living Room was originally set up as part of the artists programme, but due to various factors, including the need to develop the community engagement side of the space, Tony took the project into his remit. Tony has revamped the shop into a modern and functional space for people to get together for chats and creative activities. In August 2019 two new staff were appointed to run the Living Room, liaising with Tony and the rest of the BTO team.

This was quickly followed with the large outdoor spectacular event called Back to Bransholme (B2B). The B2B project has been the culmination of two years' work by the whole of the BTO team. The BTO team collected stories from the local shoppers, developed a script based on the stories and established new community groups, such as the Act to Ours and Back to Ours Super Choir groups, who then performed in the B2B production in October 2019. Tony liaised with 66 shops and distributed leaflets to around 2,000 residents in and around the Shopping Centre, he engaged Hub Members in the production, performance and promotion of the event. Tony even took some of the residents' chocolates to say thank you for their support and patience during the rehearsals and general disruptions of putting on a large-scale outdoor performance over 4 nights in their local Shopping Centre car park. The B2B project was the first time that the BTO team, including Tony and the Hub members, will have experienced the sheer volume of work that goes into such a significant and home-grown production, which knitted the whole of the organisation's ambitions and ideas together for the first time. The development and ethos of the B2B project has striking similarities with Welfare State's final production called Longline Carnival Opera, developed over 3 years with local residents and groups in Ulverston, Cumbria.

Tony has concerns that there may be some confusion between the separate roles of being a Hub Member and a volunteer, and how the different roles are communicated to and understood by people. This issue could be resolved through further discussions with Tony and the Hub members at future Hub meetings.

Both Tony and Louise are ambitious for the Hubs, they would like them to become self-sustaining in the future but realise this may take time to establish. Tony also says that he would like to see some of the Hub Members on the BTO steering group. The BTO staff are not daunted by the challenges that the Hubs may throw back at them and see more opportunities on the horizon for the Hubs.

The Artists that have connected with the Hub groups have feedback very positively about their experiences and they have utilised the Hubs in different ways. For example, Vicky Foster worked closely with the Derringham Hub members to help bring them together as a group, but also to

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inform the project she was developing for BTO, called Back to Earth. Vicky collected local stories from the Hub members, they informed the creative design and development of the project at all stages and have been instrumental in promoting Back to Earth to the local neighbourhood, this project will be rolled out in January 2020.

Other Artists such as Dom Heffer, worked across all of the Hub areas, engaging different demographic participants in different visual arts activities., Dom delivered workshops which included spray painting with young people in North Hull, watercolour painting with elderly residents in East Hull, he ran drop-in sessions for shoppers at the Living Room in Bransholme shopping centre and in Derringham he ran workshops in both the Fred Moore Library and met local residents at the Garrowby Orchard open day event. In total he worked with 1,627 residents, across 62 workshops which equated to 136 hours of engagement in arts activities.

Peter Snelling of My Pockets also worked in one neighbourhood, the North Hull area, and he developed a project with the local organisations including the St Mike's Youth Project, Men in Sheds and the Rainbow Garden. A common factor that all the artists described was the supportiveness of the BTO team in the development of their creative proposals and the commitment given by the Hub Members to ensure that the projects were successful.

The organic approach to connecting artists with Hub members appears to be working as each artist described different relationships with the Hubs, utilising them according to the needs of the project and the participants involved. The levels of engagement vary, from co-production with Vicky Foster to more traditional participatory involvement with Dom Heffer and Peter Snelling's projects.

The future of Hub members co-commissioning artworks should be explored further, looking at different approaches as described by Lynn Froggett, see recommendations on page 15, and through field research by visiting programmes in the UK or internationally. Two examples of community commissioning include; Atitolo in Turin, Italy ([www.atitolo.it](http://www.atitolo.it)) a project run by Lisa Parola, or Nouveaux Commanditaires in France (<http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/en/home>).

## 4. STORY OF CHANGE OUTCOMES FOR HUB MEMBERS

The outcomes described below are taken from the BTO Story of Change flow diagram (July 2019). The following outcomes have been identified specifically for the Hub Members, they include;

- Increased arts appetite and expectations of quality
- Pride in Hull
- Belief in the value of culture
- Empowerment within the arts process
- Feeling valued, and with greater confidence.

Based on interviews with six Hub Members and drawing on data from an online BTO Hub Member and Participants survey conducted by RMR, which secured responses from 79 respondents between March and December 2019, the following assertions are made.

- **Increased arts appetite, and expectations of quality**

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There is an increased appetite and expectation for more high-quality arts within the neighbourhoods that BTO is working in. Hub Members all reported having had **new arts-based experiences**, whether they've gone to the Edinburgh Fringe, or they've seen a band, such as the Pidgeon Detectives in their local area for the first time. These are momentous and sometimes life-changing experiences, such as a trip to Australia, or London for the first time, these experiences were reflected on with enthusiasm and appreciation. First-time cultural experiences have formed a strong bond of loyalty and gratitude towards BTO and have the added benefit of increasing the appetite to experience more high-quality arts events.

All interviewees reflected on the collective experience that they had in Edinburgh (August 2019), not only because they went to see 6 or 7 high-quality shows in a short intensive experience, but the experience of travelling on the train together, making new friends with other Hub Members and coming back buzzing with ideas of how they could put on art events in their own neighbourhoods. There was a strong desire across all of the interviewees to be involved in programming and commissioning events for their own local areas based on what had been seen at the Edinburgh Festival, a favourite shows which was mentioned by a number of Hub Members was Pamela's Palace (a comedy show at the Edinburgh Fringe 2019), the Hub Member from East Hull said it was interactive and fun, and could easily be put on in her neighbourhood.

The phrase "I've been to see things that I wouldn't normally go to see" was used a number of times. This showed that they had all been encouraged to try something new, and possibly out of their comfort zone. Because the experience was well planned and of high-quality, they enjoyed it, even if it wasn't something, they thought they would enjoy. An artist reflected that BTO had managed to retain the ethos of Hull2017, of encouraging audiences to try something new, this has reflected positively on the BTO team and their commitment to programming high-quality art.

Hub Members interviewed have developed a strong bond of loyalty to BTO and particularly Tony and Louise, this based on positive and safe experiences they have had on multiple occasions, this should not be underestimated, as provision of high-quality arts events is not always the experience that audiences and participants receive.

- **Pride in Hull**

Based on the RMR online survey completed by Hub Members during 2019, 92% of respondents either strongly agreed (65%) or agreed (27%) with the statement "I am proud to live in Hull", showing that the overwhelming majority of Hub Members felt a strong sense of pride in the place where they lived and wanted to bring BTO events into their neighbourhoods.

A generalised sense of pride in Hull was less evident from the face to face interviews undertaken with Hub Members, but pride in their local neighbourhoods was strong. There is an enthusiasm to celebrate and engage their local areas, either through bringing exciting art events to their area, or in filling a bus with their friends and family for a Go See visit to the B2B event.

Hub Members that were interviewed cited bringing their family and friends along to the BTO events, paying for tickets when they could get them for free from BTO, and all described with passion their desire to put on events in their own neighbourhoods.

- **Belief in the value of culture**

Culture was perceived differently by all participants interviewed and BTO may want to consider having a series of conversations with stakeholders, including Hub Members to understand what culture means to different people. For example, one Hub Member interviewed said, "I thought the



Arts Council was about photographs, pictures, statues, that sort of thing, but not about the performing arts.” It was a surprise to this Hub Member that a cultural activity such as singing, which she had been involved in most of her life, was an artform that that the Arts Council and Back to Ours would invest in and put on in her neighbourhood. Yet, performing arts is the main artform presented by BTO and very much at the heart of their programme.

Hub Members have different reasons for wanting to be part of the BTO Hub groups. Some are keen to be involved because it is important to them to be involved in the arts, whilst others are more interested in doing something for their neighbourhood. These two reasons are the main reasons for wanting to be involved with BTO It would appear to be important that each Hub group consists of members who share these motivations for the benefit of the development of the Hubs and the BTO programme.

The Hub Members generally displayed genuine feelings of altruism in their involvement with the Hub groups. They describe wanting to share their positive experiences with others, through putting on events in their local neighbourhoods. One interviewee argues that “art needs to be promoted in schools more, it’s not just about the poor kids, it should be about everyone.”

- **Empowerment within the arts process**

Through a personalised approach from the Community Engagement Manager, residents and neighbourhood workers are invited to join the Hub group meetings. This in itself is an acknowledgement of the individual’s value to the BTO project. Although, BTO may want to consider other recruitment/selection processes to widen its approach in experiment with other methods of recruitment, see Section 6, for a description of sortition as a model of recruitment.

The B2B event provided a variety of opportunities for the Hub Members to get involved with, such as performing, stewarding, and collecting feedback from the audience, this appears to have sparked an enthusiasm from some Hub Members to see similar events in their own neighbourhoods, and other parts of the city. One interviewee described how a choir was created for the B2B event, and the choir now performs regularly at other BTO events, such as Shindig.

One Hub Member described how she wanted to lobby BTO for more arts events to happen in her area. She has enlisted new Hub Members and hopes to ensure that her neighbourhood gets more arts events, as this has not been happening recently.

- **Feeling valued, and with greater confidence**

Confidence in BTO as a brand has been developed through the offer of high-quality arts events, and the continuous conversations developed through the Hub Gatherings and area Hub meetings.

Building individual Hub Members confidence is a constant theme that has come through in nearly all interviews. Many Hub Members have openly reflected that they lack confidence, but report that BTO has helped them to regain their confidence, based on new experiences, the supportive approach of BTO and the social networks they have developed through attending cultural events.

Trust is primarily developed through one-to-one conversations with Tony and or the BTO team. Two Hub Members reported that they were personally invited to events by Tony. They felt as though BTO valued them more than the Youth Centre that they were volunteering at because BTO have provided free tickets, travel and snacks to enable them to take their families to see Fagin’s



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Twist in October 2018. The extra mile that BTO goes is an example of its good practice in developing relationships. These two Hub Members reflected that BTO is important because it's "their time" when they are allowed to enjoy themselves and do something special for them.

The Back to Ours team is all known by their first names, and all Hub Members interviewed were able to recall a moment when they had spoken with the team directly, spent time with them and shared experiences and ideas, either through the Go See activities or the Hub Meetings.

Hub Members also appreciate the peer support available via the Hubs. One Member said that "I find it hard to make friends, so when I went to the Fringe, I was worried I didn't know anyone, but as soon as I went on the train, we all clicked. It's nice that BTO say thank you, but it's more the other Hub Members being supportive, that's more important."

Experiencing the arts for the first time is supported through the Go See trips which were continually referred to as a reward/treat, or something that the Hub Members would not normally be able to do. A trip to London was referred by a number of Hub Members, who had been taken to see Cirque du Soleil, for one Hub Member this was the first time that they had been London and been on the underground. This is a significant life experience that BTO has given to this Hub Member. Another Hub Member was given the responsibility of taking the group to London and this too, was an important experience for them.

Taking part in arts activities is also supported by BTO. Local residents wanting to get involved in being creative is encouraged through groups such as the Back to Ours Super Choir and Act to Ours groups, who meet regularly. One Hub Member reported that Back to Ours not only established the group but pay for a conductor from York to support the artistic development of the singers. This provides the group with a sense of being valued by BTO and greater self-confidence to perform at large scale events, such as B2B and the Shindig.

## 5. CASE STUDIES

**Craigmillar** an area outside of Edinburgh which contains a number of housing estates, the first of which were built in the 1930s. Similar to some other housing “schemes” of its time Craigmillar feel into decline, due to a lack of “educational, employment, social and cultural opportunities for the 25,000 inhabitants,” (Crummy, 1992).

The complex problems of multiple deprivation are familiar to many estate communities in the UK today, and the Craigmillar estate was similar in size to Hull’s Bransholme estate built in the 1960s and 70s for 26,000 residents, according to the Hull Data Observatory<sup>1</sup>, Bransholme and Craigmillar share similar origins, as they were both designed to receive large numbers of city residents displaced by slum clearances, they were an extension of city centre population overspill and displacement, and the famous town planner Patrick Abercrombie (Kirkness & Tijé-Dra, 2017; Starkey et al., 2017) influenced the planning and design of both estate communities.

Craigmillar (1962-2002) did not have the funding of the Arts Council’s Creative People and Places programme, but it had a resident called Helen Crummy, who had the determination and organisational skills to establish an arts festival in 1969, one of the first examples of a community arts festival (Bonet and Négrier, 2018:41). Helen Crummy wanted a better education for her son, and she decided to establish a local arts festival in which her son and the local community could perform and enjoy seeing other high-quality artists. Over the years, artists such as Billy Connolly performed at the festival, and the event grew into a significant annual arts festival recognized throughout the world as an example of high ambitions and high-quality arts programming. Helen Crummy gave talks all over the world about the Craigmillar festival and how it advocated for change to more democratic processes of engagement within local regeneration plans and how the festival became more than an arts festival to bring entertainment for the local people (Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017).

The Craigmillar Festival was created by local residents to meet local needs and creative ambitions.

### **Welfare State International (1968-2006) – Parliament of Flames**

Welfare State International (WSI) was established in December 1968, and are another important arts organisation established during the formative years of the community arts movement. WSI were driven by 2 Hull artists, namely Jon Fox and Sue Gill, although many other artists are associated with the organisation. Working in and around Bradford Art College in the 1960s they, “...took their art out into the street in order to reach an audience who wouldn’t normally cross the thresholds of elitist theatres and galleries.” (Fox, 2009). The performances of WSI were often spectacular affairs, that involved the skills of many artists to create and present an idea, but the performances were rooted in the local stories and issues that were relevant to the communities in which they were performed.

The Parliament of Flames was one of WSI’s most synonymous and spectacular outdoor fire events. It was created out of the annual local Bonfire Night events, and according to John Fox November 5<sup>th</sup> was “Britain’s last remaining fire festival” (ibid). The Parliament of Flames was presented on 5 separate occasions and grew bigger and more spectacular at each event. The performance generally involved the creation of large-scale sculptures, such as castles, galleons,

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<sup>1</sup> Weblink for the Hull Data Observatory [http://109.228.11.121/IAS\\_Live/](http://109.228.11.121/IAS_Live/) last visited on 10/12/19

or whales, which were usually ceremonially burnt at the end of the performance, accompanied by pyrotechnics, and performances of music, dance and drama.

For WSI the ambition was to create an artistically brilliant event, which engaged audiences and to varying degrees engaged participation in the making of the props and performances.

## **Artlink – Have a Go! Project**

During 2000-2003, Artlink a community arts organisation based in Hull, secured £300k from the then named National Lottery Charities Board (NLCB), to develop an estate-based community arts engagement project, based in North Hull and East Hull.

The project had 3 full time staff, who co-ordinated arts activities with local residents and voluntary sector organisations, and a training programme which was designed to support the needs of local artists to improve their facilitation skills, whilst running workshops in the local neighbourhoods. The Have a Go! Project was estate based and geographically focused, with ambitions to create arts projects that built confidence and engendered community cohesion.

After the NLCB funding finished, funding was secured until 2010 for the East Hull project and until 2005 for the North Hull project, the training programme continued until 2017.

Artlink based this project on the principles of participatory arts engagement, different artists were brought in to develop new projects based on the needs and wants to local residents. The project was highlighted in the Directory of Social Change National Fundraising Resource book (2001) as an example of the arts securing funding from the Charities section of the national lottery.

## **Fun Palaces**

The idea was originated by theatre director Joan Littlewood and architect Cedric Price. They intended to create a purpose-built Fun Palace, to which people would come for arts, technology and science activities and events. The idea was to create a ‘laboratory of fun’, or a ‘university of the streets’. The idea was started in the early 1960s but was not realised as a physical building in its time. In 2014, Stella Duffy resurrected the idea as part of the discussions that were taking place through The Movement for Cultural Democracy <sup>2</sup>, as a pop-up concept. The idea was that anyone can set up a Fun Palace in their neighbourhood, and that it would not be a standardised model, but unique to the place and community it is set up for.

In October 2018, there were 433 Fun Palaces and 110,000 people took part in activities over a weekend. The next Fun Palaces weekend event will be held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020, registration to be part of the event is at <http://funpalaces.co.uk/start-something>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://culturaldemocracy.uk/>

## 6. REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**There are many positive outcomes for BTO to reflect on in relation to the development of the Hubs over the past two years.**

- The establishment of four functioning Hub groups, with committed members who are experiencing high-quality arts engagement events on a regular basis.
- The inclusion of Hub Members in a variety of in-house BTO events, such as the commissioned arts projects, Back to Bransholme, the Living Room, and the Go See programme, and commissioned art projects from high-quality artists and arts organisations working internationally in arts engagement.
- The development of confidence of the Hub Members, and the trust earned by the BTO team in a relatively short period of time. The staff have worked intensively to achieve these results, and this should be acknowledged at a high level within the BTO organisation.
- BTO has been referred to by Artists in particular, as being the genuine legacy of Hull 2017. This is in terms of the risk taking that the organisation is been willing to undertake to achieve high-quality cultural experiences, the broad reach and connectivity of the programme and the quality of artworks developed, such as the Back to Bransholme (B2B) event.

**Recommendations based on feedback from Hub Members and research includes the following;**

### **A strengthened programme of Hubs as a model for creative engagement**

Hub Members endorsed the Living Room as a valued space for meeting and taking part in creative activities. As this is a relatively new part of the Hubs structure, the practical issues of programming a creative space and the staffing and co-ordination required, should be prioritised and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the model is working effectively and adapting to the needs and wants of the Hub Members and BTO.

Also, the opportunity to develop the Living Room as a model should be explored further, utilising in-house expertise, such as Peter McGurn's experience of establishing venue-based community engagement programmes across Hull over a number of years. Also looking beyond, the city for examples of interesting practice, such as the Bromley by Bow centre, which Tony has already identified as a possible trip.

### **Promoting and developing the BTO model of practice**

The current rhetoric of funders for cultural programming as a means for community engagement is such that BTO working practices, such as the Hubs, is an opportunity for building the brand of the organisation and offering new experiences for the Hub Members themselves.

There are a number of local and national networks that BTO could seek to develop links with, locally the #hullwewant is a collective of community activists and organisations (Knight, 2017:133) who work collaboratively to create a society that Hull people want and make for themselves, without the restrictions of funder requirements. The collaborative and organic approach of this group is in tune with much of the BTO approach. Dr Gill Hughes at the University of Hull is a key instigator and advocate of the project.

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Developing new approaches to the Hubs commissioning arts for their neighbourhoods. The models of practice report (Roy, Manley, Froggett, & Wainwright, 2018:7) explores in detail a range of approaches to community engagement. The report offers relevant examples comparable practices in co-commissioning artworks. The case studies included in the report present the multi-layered opportunities for commissioning with and for neighbourhoods. This list is not a definitive list of approaches but does offer an interesting set of defined categories which are relatable to the BTO approach and the case studies listed in Section 5 above;

- 1. Spectacular events with community involvement in which an event was produced by a professional company but with the involvement of local people. (WSI case study).
- 2. Combination of co-creation with public events in which commissioned artists collaborated on projects with communities while linking them to public events. (Fun Palaces)
- 3. Co-commissioned community art which speaks to the desires and interests of the community concerned. (Artlink case study)
- 4. Co-commissioned and co-produced community festival involving co-production with a volunteer organising committee within an existing [transport] festival. (Craigmillar Festival)
- 5. Commissioning of artistically ambitious work that necessitated audience development.

BTO may choose to adopt similar formats for recognising the types of commissioning activity that they undertake with the Hub Members, or it may seek to develop new models to this approach.

## Developing new ways of attracting Hub Members

The Community Engagement Manager has experimented with a few different approaches to recruitment of Hub Members, and experimentation should continue.

For example, the concept of sortition as developed by Brett Hennig<sup>3</sup>, is similar to the Citizens Assembly model, and is described as a stratified random selection of residents, for the purpose of coming together to make decisions on behalf of a geographic community, or community of interest. The process could be adopted by BTO as a means to approaching residents to take part in the selection of an artwork, or art project which benefits their local neighbourhood. It is a democratic approach to making representative choices on behalf of a community of interest.

Also attracting new Hub Members such as families and young people, has been suggested by a number of Hub Members. Some developments may already be in progress on this idea, as there are at least two families that have been encountered through this research. Including specific representation on the Hubs is beneficial to knowledge sharing and programming if the Hubs are interested in programming and managing events for this specific audience.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://newint.org/authors/brett-hennig>

## What is the next level?

It is evident that the staff team, the Hub Members and many of the Artists commissioned by BTO have been on a journey, it is one of the most cited phrases in interviews and discussions had over the past 12 months.

## Developing skills and knowledge sharing of the staff team

Encouraging the staff to progress their ideas and knowledge into the public arena, such as presenting conferences, networking events and meetings is important for the development of critical thinking and the development of new ideas. For example, if a contentious piece of programming has proven to be successful then this learning should be shared. It will be important for the staff to set their own learning targets and follow this through in a supported format.

## Deeper development for the established Hub Members

The Hub Members are enthusiastic and willing to participate, this is a currency worth cashing in on. A consultation process of what learning will be of benefit for the Hub Member, would be useful, if this hasn't already been undertaken. Currently the BTO programme focuses on performing arts, some of which is challenging but the majority is "familiar". CPPI recommends taking the Hub Members further into the arts world, into more challenging territories, in order to develop the critical voice of the Hub Members, so that they have a broad range of experiences to draw on. This may require buying-in or setting up a Go See trip to a challenging and culturally elitist artform or event, it maybe political driven or artistically elitist, but the intention to deepen the Hub Members appreciation and criticality of their experience is worth developing for the benefit of the BTO programming.

## Artists are part of the Hubs commissioning process

Not all artists are familiar with working in neighbourhoods. Some of the artists interviewed described how they were learning on the job, they were appreciative of the support they received from BTO, but it can be a lonely job being an artist, one artist said "we're just people doing a job, ... members of the community, with the same worries and concerns. We're not wheeled in on golden chariots." Another Artist said that rather than offering training to the Hub Members which explained how to commission artists, that the artists probably needed the training which explains how to work with the communities more.

There may also be some learning to be developed for staff running new community Hubs, which looks at working with Artists, programming the spaces as well as the necessary community service provision skills required for the role.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are very grateful to the BtO team, particularly Tony Forrester and Louise Yates, the Hub members and artists that made time to speak with us and were incredibly generous in sharing their stories, thoughts and ideas during the interviews and discussions.

Also, the generosity of knowledge, time and resources from Rich Morfitt – Insight Analyst at Hull City Council, and Malcolm Relph the Head of City Economy at Hull City Council.



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## APPENDIX 1 – ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

<b>Phase 1</b>		
Tony Forrester interview - staff	27/2/19	
BTO Festival	18/2/19-24/2/19	The Allotment
East Hull Hub Member interview	7/3/19	
Louise Yates interview - staff	14/3/19	
Phase 1 Report submitted	25/3/19	
<b>Phase 2</b>		
North Hull Hub Member interview	21/3/19	
BTO Festival	24/5/19-1/6/19	Chores and Truth to Power
Pan Hub Meeting at Comedy Lounge	1/5/19	
Planning meeting with RM&TONY	16/5/19	
Pan Hub Meeting at Comedy Lounge	12/6/19	
Tony Forrester – interview - staff	4/6/19	
Tony Forrester interview - staff	9/7/19	
Tony Forrester interview - staff	6/8/19	
Tony Forrester interview - staff	17/9/19	
Tony Forrester interview - staff	10/10/19	
Louise Yates interview - staff	22/10/19	
Pan Hub Meeting at Comedy Lounge	24/9/19	
BTO Festival	28/10/19-3/11/19	Back to Bransholme
Tony Forrester interview - staff	12/11/19	
Tony Forrester interview - staff	10/12/19	
East Hull Hub Member interview	11/12/19	
Derringham Hub Member interview	12/12/19	
2 x North Hull Hub Members interview	10/12/19	
Commissioned Artist	13/12/10	
Commissioned Artist	3/1/20	
Commissioned Artist	6/1/20	
Phase 2 Report submitted	9/1/20	

### Hub Gathering 1 - 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019

#### Agenda

7pm Arrival Wine or Fruit Juice

7.20 Tony Forrester Community Engagement Manager

7.25 Bax - Bud Sugar Music Video call Out

7.30 Thom (Producer) Up and coming festival.

7.45 Artiste Commission Demonstration – Urban Opera

7.50 Clare (Producer & Programming) to introduce the commissioned artists and explain why we have them and who is working where.

8.10 Food & Chat to the artists

*Hot carved Beef or Turkey served in a Baguette with Hot Roast Potatoes stuffing and Sauces.*

*Chefs Special Vegetarian Pie and Roast Potatoes.*

8.45 Louise Yates (Director) to talk to about the future of Back to Ours and what big surprises we have for October and how can you and your community can be involved.

9.15 Tea & Coffee Mingle and chat

9.45. Fabulous Comedian Bill Wooland will finish of the evening

10.15 Close

The comedy club is a relatively small venue, dimly light as a performance venue would be. The tables are laid out for small groups of up to 8 at each table. There teas and coffees available for the audience to enjoy before the event is started. People congregate at tables according to who they already know and are familiar with, although some networking takes place around the tea and coffee area.

**Tony** introduces the format for the evening, explains that the area Hub meetings were working, but they want to try and bring everyone together and see how that works. He then compares the different presentations and talks.

**Thom** introduces the new productions that we be coming up as part of the festival programme. Truth to Power with Jeremy Goldstein, they are looking for volunteers to take part. Tom runs through some of the festival programme due to take place.

**Claire** then comes on stage to talk about the Artists Commissions, some are already up and running and some will get started soon. Clare runs through the commissions and introduces the artists sat in the room, to make them identifiable to the audience.

Artists and brief description of commissions include;

1. Creative Briefs – Jason will be taking a skip around the different communities and creating a different environment in the skip in each area.
2. Vicky Foster – writer will be working with local communities to develop stories.
3. We Made This – Miranda will be running craft workshops.
4. Jerome Whittingham – photographer will be documenting the projects, festivals and all things BTO over the coming months.

## THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

5. Dom Heffer – Communication station will be visual arts workshops in different areas to create a final communication station.
6. Eat the Crayons – theatre company.
7. Hull Urban Opera – popping up in different locations around hull and performing opera.
8. Karen Lee Stow – photographer.

Projects that are already underway include;

9. Monster Extraction by My Pockets Hull Dance in East Hull
10. The Human Jukebox by The McGuire's
11. Andy Train R&D
12. Chrissie Lewis – The Rainbow Garden
13. Infuse Dance
14. The Living Room at North Point Shopping Centre
15. Pride Parade
16. Freedom
17. Sesh
18. Elliot Jarvis
19. Ellie Bramer
20. Zoe Hughes – clown
21. Spin Off Productions and Danny's Dream
22. Rooted – Urban Farm in Hull
23. Anabel McCourt and Age UK (?)
24. Beats Bus – Spring Bank
25. Brick by Brick Theatre co – Hessle Road
26. Artlink – Spring Bank murals

**Louise** then comes on stage to talk about the Back to Bransholme project they are working on, for October half term, large scale community project, want to get everyone involved in the local area, and the Hub members, so if you're interested get in touch. The project will be a big spectacular event, this ones in Bransholme, next time they will do something similar in another area of Hull.

They are also working on bringing Casus, an Australian Circus Company back who some Hub members might remember from their show Driftwood in 2018, BTO are commissioning a new piece of work called DNA, this will also be in the October half term. Louise and another Hub member – Vicky Suddaby - went to see them perform a version of DNA and a show called Chasing Smoke at Adelaide Fringe in February.

Also, Louise explains that the Hub members are central to the BTO bid to the Arts Council, which will be submitted soon, with the outcome known in September / October this year. So, keep your fingers crossed for us.

**Tony** finishes off by saying the Hub meeting will be every 6 months.

# THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

**Notes:** This is an information giving event with a social and food as the hook. The event worked quite well as an information giving event, but a social it is limited to people socialising in their familiar groups.

The group responded well to the evening, seemed to enjoy the format, although there were possibly more artists than Hub members at the event?

Possibly also a bit unclear what was going to happen in the evening.

## Hub Gathering 2 – 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019

The Comedy Club (same venue as before), this is an evening event, which has a feel of going out for many of the attendees. There are 40-50 people, this is a mixed group of adults and some children. 7 large tables, with around 8 people on each table. Jason the actor is present this evening to welcome people as they arrive and offer them drinks, he is in full butler outfit. There is also food and drinks available this evening. The space is lively, with the hustle and bustle of a club venue.

I meet and greet people arriving to ask them to complete an event observation form, 41 Hub members sign in, this does not include artists, staff and others like me.

**Tony** is the compare, he is informal in style, he tells the audience the format for the evening. He asks audience members to feed in their questions for the Arts Council, there are sheets at the back of the room, for people to write their questions on. He also asks the room if anyone wants to be involved in Pride this year, they are having a float and getting dressed up, there will be an 80s theme for the BTO float.

**Louise** introduces a film showing Casus the circus company who they have commissioned to create a piece for BTO October Festival, it will be showcased at the Edinburgh Fringe.

We're wanting to work with Freedom Festival and a group of hub members on their circus programme, this would involve meeting Freedom Festival and seeing some of the shows in Edinburgh before they come to Freedom Festival, Tony will speak to a few people this evening who might be interested. .

**Ellen Bianchini from the Big Malarkey** – comes on stage to talk about the Big Malarkey Festival in June, introducing the theme 'join the library, see the world', invites people to come along and be part of the event, says there are tickets available through BTO. Also says that Nick Sharratt is the featured author at the festival.

**Baks from Budsugar** then stands to speak – he introduces himself and the band, they are creating a theme song for BTO, and they are looking for 300-400 people to join a street party scene, this will happen in the next 4 weeks and they are filming in the Orchard Park Estate area. All welcome.

# THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

**Chrissie from BTO** – gives a marketing update on what she does, and asks what is missing, what do people need from the marketing. She asks for some community reporters, if anyone is interested to talk to her afterwards. She asks for feedback on what community magazines and Facebook pages they are using.

**Vicky Foster writer** – tells the audience about her writer in residence work in Derringham, research on the Spring Head and the floods at all the History Centre. Is always looking for stories.

**Lydia writer** – also stands and addresses the room, explaining who she is and who she works with in Hull. She asks two questions, she is looking for stories about East Park and other special locations.

**Tony** – thanks the artists and organisers for coming along this evening, he suggests that everyone has a comfort break, gets a coffee and chats to the artists and fills in the sheets at the back of the room.

People get up and start chatting, but some stay in their seats in their original groups. I'm not sure how much the artists benefit from the networking, but the event ends well, and people have enjoyed their evening.

**Notes:** the format of the evening has progressed to be more welcoming with the actor, more enjoyable with the food and drinks on arrival. The information giving was well organised and interesting but engaging the Hub members appears to be minimal.

Some of the Hub members were quite vocal about how they enjoy this evening, it's a social event for them to come together, so it's fun and they feel like they are part of BTO.

## Hub Gathering 3 – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019

Comedy Club venue, with similar format to the previous event, including buffet and drinks reception with Jason the actor. Attendance is around 40+.

**Tony** starts the evening off with an update a bit of information about BTO.

**Louise** does a funding update, explains that the Living Room is funded by the Lottery, BTO have secured the Arts Council funding, but it is only a third of the original amount, therefore things will have to be reduced, such as the festivals and commissions. Esme Fairburn are funding the Hubs programme.

Up and coming programme will include DNA show at Sirius West at £3 per ticket. Back to Bransholme will be a punk-pop opera with circus performances, at the North Point Shopping Centre. This is a BTO production based on the stories of real Bransholme residents, the story begins in the 1940s and runs through to the present day. Shows will run from 26<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> October and will include local performers and back stage people. Louise is really excited about this production.



## THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

**Tony** – adds to Louise’s information, but asking for volunteers to take part in the productions, to help out on social media promotion. BTO will be putting on buses for each of the Hub areas, so they can attend the shows over half term, he asks the Hub members to help fill the buses.

Tony asks Michael Hills to join in on stage, Michael is from the East Hull Hub. Michael tells the audience he went to the Edinburgh Fringe last year with BTO for the first time, he had an amazing time and would recommend Pamela’s Palace. He is an avid attender of pantomime’s and has been to 10 panto’s already this year.

**Tony** – does some other project updates. He reports that the Vicky Foster project is going well, she has done a lot of research around the water pumps on Spring Bank and flooding in Hull, this has joined up with Yorkshire Waters outreach team. Dom Heffer’s Communication Station will tour around the Hub areas, they are looking for volunteers to help man the station. Also, Chatty Hull is happening and BTO are involved helping to set up 20+ chat spaces.

Tony talks about the Living Room project which has changed recently, with new staff, Tony introduces Jen who is the Co-Ordinator, she has lots of previous experience of running community events, she says that BTO recognised the need for a space for people to come together to talk and be creative. They are primarily a chat shop, which is about community cohesion and will feed into future projects. The front room is for chatting and the back room is for people to get creative.

Tony – asks people to fill in the evaluation forms which are given out, this is a quarterly evaluation survey?

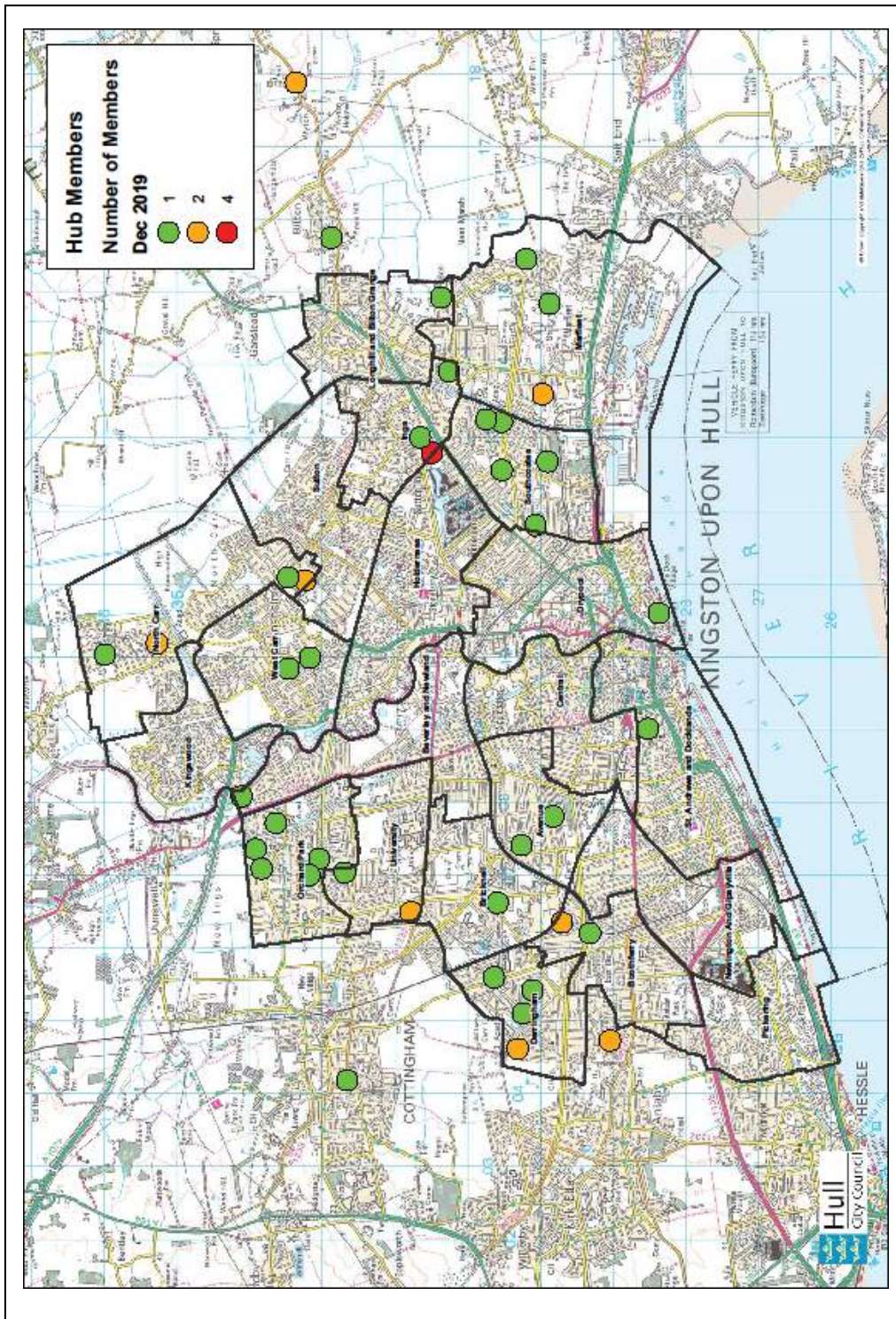
BTO have rolled out a volunteer programme to increase volunteers, this is going well.

BTO are switching the Christmas lights on this year.

**Notes** – more is being asked of the Hub members at each meeting, is this being responded to with positive engagement? The format is improving at each event, the feedback from attenders is always positive. The group appears to change slightly, but some are definitely regular attenders.

# THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

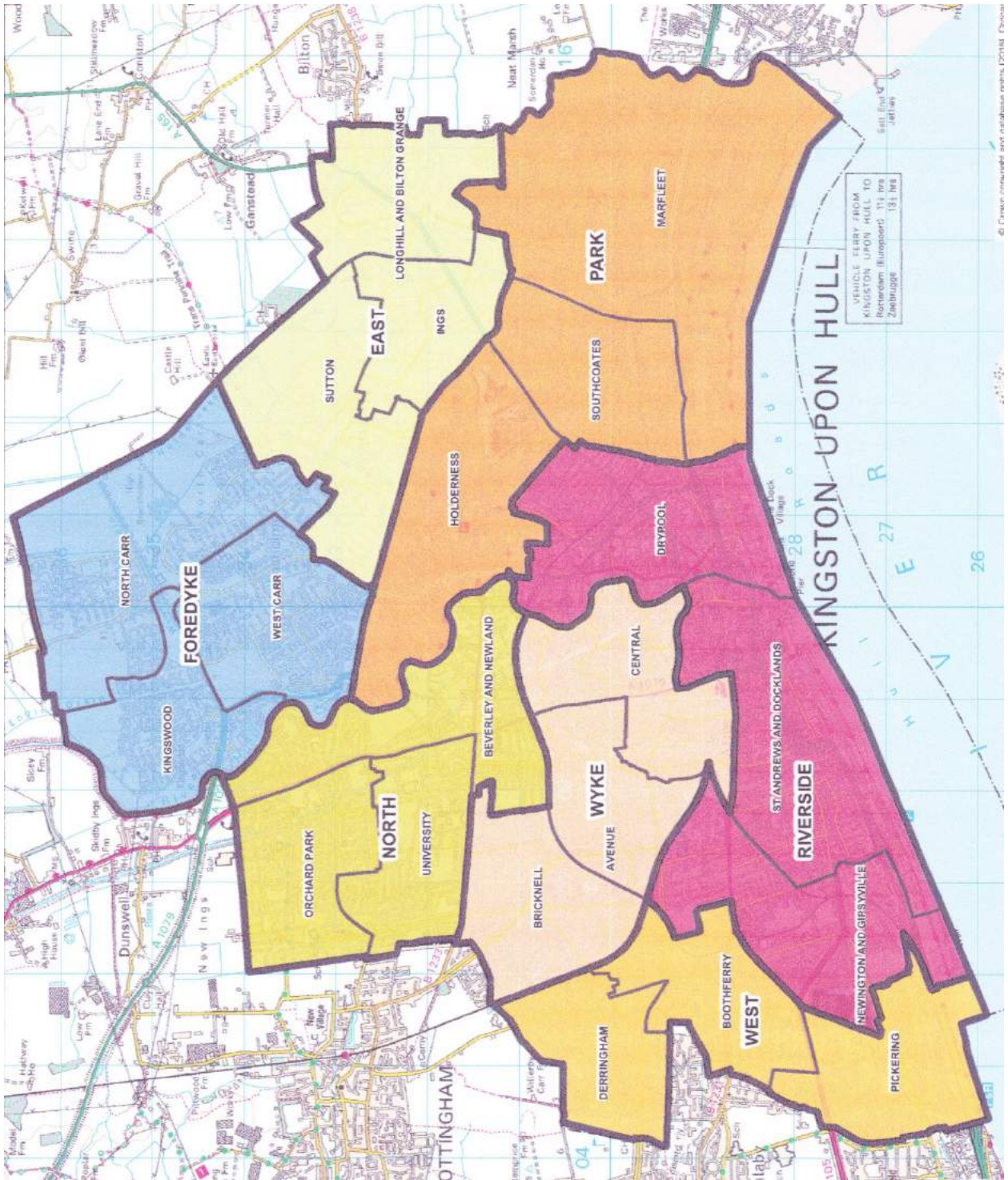
## APPENDIX 3 – HUB MEMBER MAP





# THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

## APPENDIX 4 - HULL CITY COUNCIL AREA COMMITTEE AND WARD BOUNDARIES



# THE BACK TO OURS - HUBS REPORT

## APPENDIX 5 - LOCAL AND NATIONAL RANK OF HULL DEPRIVED WARDS IN 2018

	National Rank	Local Rank
Orchard Park and Greenwood	5	1
St Andrew's	16	2
Myton	22	3
Bransholme East	37	4
Bransholme West	38	5
Marfleet	41	6
Southcoates East	65	7
Newington	88	8
Longhill	194	9
Drypool	385	10
Pickering	429	11
University	602	12
Southcoates West	612	13
Newland	687	14
Avenue	1085	15
Sutton	1190	16
Ings	1249	17
Derringham	1757	18
Boothferry	2133	19
Beverley	3239	20
Kings Park	3313	21
Bricknell	3389	22
Holderness	3510	23

Note: National ranking is based on 7529 wards in England





# Back to Ours Festival Highlights Report 2018-19

## Chat to Ours

# Introduction:

## The Reports, The Festivals and Us

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

This Report presents the highlights from Chat to Ours' analysis of four Back to Ours Festivals in 2018 and 2019.

It draws on the reports produced for the half-term Festivals in October 2018, February 2019, May 2019 and October 2019. (There were three festivals in 2018 but October 2018 was our first report.)

The aim of the reporting was to share the findings from our research, and provide a reflection point for further discussion.

We commissioned a writer (Ben Morgan) to work with us, along with Christie Parkin and Ruth Melville to pull together the reports.

This Highlights Report is an extension of our reporting process, allowing us to reflect on our key findings and illustrates these with the best observations and stories from the four festivals.

After this Introduction, the report is divided into three sections: **The Festival Experience, The Themes** and **Summary**.

### BACK TO OURS: THE FESTIVALS

Back to Ours grew out of the half term festivals held during the Hull UK City of Culture in 2017. The focus is on high quality shows in the local communities – 'right on your doorstep' – that are accessible and affordable.

Reflecting this, the venues for shows include schools, churches, shopping centres, social clubs and community centres.

The festivals covered in this report:

#### October 2018 Festival

28 performances, 11 venues, 8 different shows:

- Bullish (Milk Presents)
- Fagin's Twist (Avant Garde Dance and The Place)
- Jungle Book (Gary Starr Pantos)
- Mr Satie (Teatr Atofri)
- Rick Witter and Paul Banks from Shed Seven (Under the Influence)
- Secret Gigs (Ceri Dupree, Cannon and Ball)
- Slime (The Herd and Hull Libraries).

#### February 2019 Festival

30 performances, 12 venues, 7 shows:

- A Super Happy Story
- Delicate Flowers
- Dodgy
- Secret Gig (LaLa Piano Bar)
- Secret Gig (The Grumbleweeds)
- The Allotment
- The Giant Jam Sandwich.

#### May 2019

45 performances, 9 venues, 7 shows:

- Ash (Under the Influence)
- Chores
- High Horse (Back to Ours)
- Powering Up (A play in two days, Back to Ours)
- Secret Gig (Acro, Clown, Sword Swallower, Bobby Davro at William Gemmell Social Club)
- Secret Gig (Soul Sensation & Ruby Red at Willows Social Club)
- Truth to Power Café.

#### October 2019

10 performances, 2 venues, 2 shows:

- Back To Bransholme
- DNA by Casus Circus.



## CHAT TO OURS: INTELLIGENCE FROM THE COMMUNITY

### Who we are

We are a group of Hull residents who volunteered to go out to the Back to Ours events and get a feel for how the audience is responding.

Our name, *Chat to Ours*, comes from 'just chatting to people' – using an informal and friendly approach to capture insights into audiences' behaviour and responses.

For example, as we often stand near the doorway at a show, audiences offer spontaneous feedback as they leave. There are lots of 'thank yous', and people show a willingness to talk about their experiences.

Pride in Hull 2018 was the first time we officially came together. As a group, we bring extensive experience of volunteering (Hull's City of Culture programme, sports championships worldwide and charities) and a diverse set of individual skills. All this has created a unique group and we aim to continually grow and diversify.

For the May 2019 Festival, three new members joined us from the Back to Ours Community Hubs.

### What we do

Chat to Ours is about more than volunteers from Hull gathering data. We work together to develop research questions, methods and do the analysis of our findings.

All the analysis in our reports has been carried out by the group. This followed training in ethnographic data gathering and analysis from Ruth Melville (external evaluator of Back to Ours), and Franco Bianchini (The University of Hull's Culture, Place and Policy Institute). Ruth and Christie, the Monitoring & Evaluation Coordinator, also provided ongoing mentoring, advice, training and support.

Franco was kind enough to recognise our commitment and skill level in his Culture, Place, and Policy Institute report:

"CTO members are highly articulate and capable when engaging with members of the public... The quality of their working practices is to be commended."

– CPPI's Chat to Ours Report

At shows, generally we take on one of three roles:

- **Observing:** Recording how people react pre, post and during shows
- **Chatting:** Talking to audiences in a familiar and comfortable way, in order to gather feedback about the events.
- **Postcards:** Asking people to fill in postcards to capture more formal demographic information on audiences, to feed into Arts Council reporting.

There is a rota for the roles and there are usually two or three of us at each event.

At Back to Bransholme, a larger outdoor show, we also assisted with the Welfare, Access and Information point. At DNA, we asked audiences specifically what they thought of schools as a venue.

### An investigative team

We are an investigative team, the face of Back to Ours to our audience and part of the wider volunteer team. We observe, record and analyse 'customer experience', how people react to the shows.

This forms an important part of gauging and evaluating the success of a Festival – hearing the voices of our audience. We can help Back to Ours achieve one of its key aims – 'everyone enjoys themselves and goes away feeling they've had a great day or night out' (Back to Ours Launch and Festival Report).

Like the Back to Ours staff team, we are passionate about what we do – it's why we have given over 85 days of volunteer time over the four festivals.

Chat to Ours have contributed 85+ days of volunteering time over four festivals<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated from Back to Ours' own figures and based on an 8 hour day

# The Festival experience: Observations

Initially we were asked by the Back To Ours team to explore how audiences respond to the festival experience.

Through working with Christie and Ruth, we identified five broad areas that we have used throughout our reporting to think about this. These are very practical and about how the festivals ran and people responded:

1. Marketing and communications
2. Buying tickets
3. Location and venue
4. The welcome
5. Entertainment around the event

It is worth noting that there were points of overlap between:

- These five different areas. For example, the venue dictates the (physical) welcome area; pre-show entertainment might add to the attractiveness of the welcome.
- These areas and our themes. For example, how the audience was looked after appears under both The Welcome and our Audience Interactions theme (when discussing volunteers, parents and children).

Below are summaries of the key findings from our observations. More detailed discussions appear in the individual reports.

## 1. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

**Word of mouth and 'the internet' were key.** They were the most frequently mentioned when people were asked about how they heard about the shows. 'The internet' often meant Facebook or local websites like Mumbler, an online parenting community used to discover what is happening for families in Hull and the East Riding.

**People came back for more.** Once they'd been to one show, they often came again or told other people they should come along. We have found this more and more as the number of events increases. This included children bringing parents or grandparents, or seeing a new festival brochure and wanting to see another show.

**The brochures worked.** Having them delivered and put in school bags got people to come to the shows. The general reaction to them was positive, though people had lots of ideas how to make them even better, when we specifically asked this question at the February 2019 festival.

### **Tweaks to the marketing had an impact.**

Delivering the brochures to homes using hyper-local marketing techniques, translated marketing materials, show notes, and individual flyers were all positive additions to the marketing.

## 2. BUYING TICKETS

**Broadly the ticketing worked.** Allowing people to buy tickets in person (through Hull Truck) as well as online was appreciated. The later use of Libraries as 'box offices' also seemed successful.

**People loved the low prices.** Though sometimes they couldn't believe a ticket was that cheap, or thought it might reflect the quality of the show.

"Best £3 I've ever spent. Worth at least £15..."

**Audience member, DNA**

**Ticketing glitches.** Though the majority of people had no problem, some Festivals had their share of ticketing problems. This included the Hull Truck and Hull Box Office websites being unavailable. At one festival, there was some confusion over how many free adult tickets were included with each child ticket.

## 3. LOCATION AND VENUE

**Familiar and nearby venues work.** Using familiar venues close to where people live encourages them to come along. Overall, people reacted positively to the venues chosen.

"We love that it's near to where we live... We love Back to Ours."

**East Hull families at The Allotment, St Aidan's Church**

**Comfort, accessibility and good facilities are crucial.** People didn't like cold waiting areas, uncomfortable seating or the lack of baby changing facilities.

**The right performance space matters.** The layout of the performance space can have varying levels of impact (positive and negative) on audiences and influence behaviour.

**Signage needs to be clear.** Clear directions to a venue are important, as is the signage within it – especially if it's large or has poor general signage. We have had some challenges with this at larger venues such as Wilberforce College. To tackle this, we added extra wayfinding volunteers to greet and guide audiences.

**'Unorthodox' venues can pose unique challenges.** From the expectations of regulars at the social clubs, to the question of whether a school was the right place to stage a play about transgender issues (when 'school' might come with lots of negative memories).

**Using a school as a venue has positives.** When asked specifically about this at DNA shows, audiences mentioned that it was easy to get to and they liked the fact that the school was being used when it might otherwise have been empty. They also saw the school as a focal point for the community and so it made sense to stage a show there. Additionally, a number of people were curious to see inside.

We like the local venues especially this one as it was very close to us and less stressful with three children – a more friendly atmosphere where people would help out.

– Audience Member, Thornton Village Hall, Mr Satie

#### 4. THE WELCOME

**Friendly entrance areas and greetings set the right tone.** An inviting welcome area with things to engage the audience, such as colouring books or other pre-show activities was a positive. A warm 'meet and greet' by volunteers reinforced this. (This was often also related to *Pre-show Entertainment* – see below).

**Looking after the audience makes a difference.**

There were numerous examples of staff and volunteers making sure audiences felt comfortable and able to enjoy the show. (This is also part of the *Audience Interactions* theme below). Examples of this include offering assistance to audience members with additional needs, or simply helping adults with young children.

**Having time and space means better feedback.**

For Chat To Ours, we get the best feedback from audiences when there is time and space for a conversation – and this is particularly true at the start of a show. People respond well if they aren't rushing, are relaxed, there's time for a chat and there's not too much noise. The space available at particular venues lends more to this. When planning the pre-show welcome and Chat to Ours activity, we always take this into consideration. We try not to have too many uniformed staff and volunteers in compact welcome areas, as this could be a barrier to those audience members who may not be accustomed to attending arts events and shows.

**Accommodating Polish language speakers made shows more accessible.**

For the October 2018 Festival, translating marketing materials and teaching volunteers key Polish phrases, made shows more welcoming for our Polish-speaking audience members. This was as a result of Teatr Atofri's show, *Mr Satie - Made In Paper* being part of this festival.

#### 5. ENTERTAINMENT AROUND THE EVENT

**Pre-show entertainment adds to overall**

**enjoyment.** Whether coloured capes (High Horse at North Point Shopping Centre), colouring books, Snack To Ours, show notes or the 'Le Chef' character, giving people (particularly young people) things to do before a show was a real success.

**Post-show entertainment works too.**

The entertainment doesn't always stop with the end of the show. From photo opportunities with performers, to badges for adults and children, to taking home the props (notably toilet rolls at Chores, lavender bags at The Allotment and letters from Back to Bransholme).

**SAMPLE OBSERVATION:**  
**MR SATIE, OCTOBER 2018 FESTIVAL**

13 children and 12 adults. Two adults came with no children.

1.50 pm audience started arriving. Single man buys ticket for Mr Satie because of his interest in Back to Ours. I recognised some children and adults from other Back to Ours events in this Festival. Everyone waited very quietly. A small girl was excited to spot a 'princess' through the door. They were asked to remove shoes – no complaints. All quietly listened to the announcements in English and Polish.

Once in the Hall everyone waited quietly, no chat. Children looked at the pile of the paper. A small child asked parents, 'What's that knocking?' when piano playing started. All eyes were on the performance. When the performer tapped her head, a small girl looked at her mum, smiled and tapped her own head.

Children seemed engrossed in what was going on. A small girl was pointing at the performer who was wrapped in paper. Everyone still looking at the performers – nobody distracted. Children following the movement. All smiling

Small girl grins and then picks up a piece of paper which had blown towards her and threw it back on to the performance area. Child stood up, turned to her mum, asked a question. Mum shook her head and the child sat down again. The children seemed mesmerised, following the actions of the boats. One very animated little boy mouth wide open as the boats appear to be in a storm. Children looked so relaxed. Little girl lay on her front, resting her head on her hands, watching intently what was going on. Another little girl had her head on her mother's knee.

Mainly boys were looking intently at the aeroplanes as they were moved around. Many adults smiling at their children's reactions. The youngest child there looked at her father and smiled when the ball was found. Children needed encouragement to roll the ball but eventually they did, and it was passed from side to side. Other children then became involved.

A little boy tried to blow the paper which was on the performance area. A girl throws some paper back on to the performance area. At this point the children were encouraged to join the performers on the paper. They were wrapping themselves in paper, throwing and tearing it too. Some puzzled faces when the performers spoke to a small group of children. Parents helped to fold red paper to make hats. More adults folding than children. Small girl puts hat on her head and her dad then puts it on his head and the child squealed with laughter. She had previously been playing with a pen and the pen top – seemed to lose interest temporarily.

One small boy didn't like to have the hat put on his head. Most children played with the torn paper on the mat. One boy was a little reluctant to join in but eventually started running around and chasing another boy. Volunteers all playing with children, but one was particularly involved. Children were throwing paper at the volunteers. Two children attempt to bury their dad in paper while he videos their antics. Performers interact with the children, stamping their hands but one girl refused to have her hand stamped. Parents taking photographs of their children playing with the paper, filling hats with paper.

Two adults who came without children left. Children carry on playing, parents interact, paper ball fight. Always jolly.

Graham Reedier

## Emerging themes: Recurring topics, engaging stories

Here, based on our observations and analysis, we summarise the themes that have emerged over the last four festivals.

These are around how people relate to the shows, the performance and other people in the audience.

Some themes were constant throughout all our reports (Audience Interactions), whilst others were specific to certain festivals.

Below are four key themes which represent our key findings:

1. **Audience interactions**
2. **Wow!**
3. **Challenging the audience**
4. **Familiarity and fans**

To illustrate these and the audience engagement more generally, we include in this section:

- Brief descriptions of the themes and their different aspects, plus our relevant observations.
- Short stories and snapshots from different shows.
- Two observation transcripts, giving a flavour of both the shows and our methodology.

### **THEME ONE: AUDIENCE INTERACTIONS**

**We noticed throughout all four festivals the role of audience members in interpreting and supporting each other's experience of the shows.**

There were four main parts to this theme:

- Children taking control
- Parents supporting or influencing children
- Adults engaging other adults
- Volunteers, children and parents

### **Children taking control**

A show gave children the freedom or permission to 'lead' the adults.

- At several October 2018 shows, children dragged their adult into the performance area of Mr Satie - Made in Paper. This was facilitated by performers giving the children permission to interact.
- At High Horse, some parents were quite shocked by their children's responses to the actors' invitations to contribute and actively defended their position relating to their child's comments.

### **Grandad**

Three children desperately wanted their Grandad to see High Horse. Their mum came to The Living Room twice to check show times as they had to wait for Grandad to finish work. They excitedly brought him to the final show of the day, showing their obvious love for him and their determination to share it with him.

### **Parents supporting or influencing children**

Parents often interpreted or shaped children's experience of show.

- At Giant Jam Sandwich, parents in one family emphasised to their children (who were 'reviewers') about the importance of their feedback so that they could review the show and help improve standards. This came about as a result of speaking to us before the show began.
- At The Allotment, a female audience member was overheard saying to her two grandsons that vegetables with eyes were silly. As a result, the older of the two boys did not get involved with the show, but spent the whole time playing with the abacus. His younger brother though, was happily engaged and did not seem to be affected by the comment.

## Expectations

I hear a mum explaining the 'expectations' of the theatre to her daughter aged around 4:

'You need to sit on your seat, listen to what is happening and not shout out; that's what happens at the theatre.'

The lights go out and the theatre is dark. The family in front of me gasp. A loud announcement happens, a toddler clings to the person next to him. The actors appear, a little girl shouts out: 'They are here!' Her parents smile at her and then exchange smiles. (Chores)

## Adults engaging other adults

Adults interacted with each other in a couple of interesting ways.

- At Mr Satie - Made In Paper, seeing another parent in the audience playing with the paper allowed others to feel that they could get involved themselves. The layout of the audience seating really helped with this.
- From observations at Slime, adults also used the performances as a way to meet up before a show.

## Volunteers, children and parents

The interrelationship between volunteers, children and parents produced many interesting stories. This relates to The Welcome (above) and how looking after the audience makes a real difference.

- An Absolutely Cultured volunteer was helping a child with a drawing when another child decided to come and join her. Then another child, whose mum was interacting with her, seemingly decided that the volunteer looked more interesting and left mum to join in. This was a lovely moment as the volunteer then had three children around her (The Allotment).
- One child refused to enter the theatre area at High Horse. When the show started, his brother burst into tears and was escorted out by one of his parents. Great effort was made by staff and volunteers to accommodate this family. They ended up sitting on the floor of the Living Room space watching the whole

show, whilst fully interacting, through a gap in the drape curtains.

## THEME TWO: WOW!

**One thing that really struck us was the intensity of the experience for some people and how emotional it could be.**

There were six elements to this theme:

- Deep involvement
- Moment of joys
- Emotional connection
- The audiences returns for more
- Sharing with the group
- Audiences shape the show

## Deep involvement

Audience members became spellbound – totally engaged by a show.

- Two toddlers were sitting side by side, sharing lots of snacks including jam sandwiches. They rarely took their eyes off the stage, except to turn to the row behind to give their mums their rubbish. An elder brother smiles at them and joined in too. We spot looks of pride and amusement on the mums' faces. All three children were open-mouthed when they saw the size of the dough, followed by the bread and finally, the sandwich (The Giant Jam Sandwich).
- Pre-show a mother said it would be a miracle if her son sat in his seat for 30 minutes. It was explained the show was about 50 minutes in duration, but very energetic with lots going on. After the show, the mother said he never took his eyes off the performers (Chores).

"Phenomenal. Fantastic. Out of this world. Never seen anything like it. Every minute brilliant. Best thing I've EVER seen."

**Audience member, DNA**



## Moments of joy

The shows produced pure, spontaneous happiness.

- At the end of Fagin's Twist, a young boy was seen to be dancing as he came back into the foyer. It appears that he was inspired by the dancing in the performance. He carried on dancing while the adults with him went to the toilet. When they returned to him, he carried on dancing and out down the corridor.
- People responding to 'Love Train' by forming a conga line and dancing through the rest of the audience and around the tables. (Secret Gig, February 2018 Festival)

### Astounded and moved

After the second performance (at High Horse) a woman came to speak to me while her husband and seven-year-old daughter played nearby. She was absolutely astounded and moved beyond description at her daughter's reaction during the performance.

She and her husband had adopted the little girl a year ago after she'd been removed from her birth parents. She'd seen terrible things happening to a sibling in an abusive home and, as a result, is very wary and always has to know she's in sight of her parents. She has triggers which her reactions show are reminding her of her previous life. She is full of enthusiasm and keen to take part in activities with others but is always unable to do so and backs off.

However, much to the amazement and joy of her parents she took part in High Horse and even gave her real name. Mum asked me to pass on her thanks to the actor.

While her mum was talking to me, her daughter was displaying behaviour which her parents recognise as showing she is comfortable and feeling unthreatened. She certainly appeared to be a delightful, happy, well-adjusted child.

Not even all of her adopted family know her previous circumstances and the mum said she had spoken to me in such detail because she felt comfortable doing so. She now can't wait to tell her daughter's teacher what had happened that afternoon.

## Emotional connection

Some shows had a real emotional impact, connecting with something profound.

- A suited man in his forties took to the stage. He began his talk about his life – coming out to his friends and family, fighting to see his daughter after a separation and also his faith. A couple of ladies on the front row began to cry and neighbours comforted them. The talker's voice broke and audible sobbing sounds were heard from the front row. The biggest applause of the evening greeted this story (Truth to Power).
- A Super Happy Story had a strong emotional impact on the audiences that saw it. At Thornton Village Hall show, the audience watched the entire performance intently and in silence apart from laughter at appropriate points. The facial expressions showed some were visibly moved, others wiped away tears.
- This lady started a conversation with me while I was getting her postcode. She said that she lives in one of the RAF houses and that her husband had seen the ghost of an RAF man at the top of their stairs. I suggested that she went to the Living Room and chat to people there and see the exhibition. (Back to Bransholme).

### The Power

The following was told to one of our colleagues at Truth to Power Café:

'I only found out about this last minute. After a very traumatic day training for the Race for Life and ending up in tears. I pushed myself to come and see this...You see, I have cancer.

I have had a very difficult journey in my life after losing two babies and fighting 'the cancer', so, after a gruelling day training, I was flagging until I came here and heard all those beautiful words by all those wonderful speakers.

It was inspiring to me and gave me the lift I needed to carry on. I am very grateful for everything in my life including the cancer as it has taught me how precious life really is.

I wholeheartedly believe I was meant to be here tonight. It has given me the Power to not only be inspired but to go ahead and inspire others."

## The audiences returns for more

Audiences came back for more – often bringing new people with them.

- Children bringing different parents or grandparents to different performances. This was children loving a performance so much that they returned to another performance of the same show.
- A child who had seen Slime with their parent(s) at Hull Libraries and had come again with their Grandparent, because the child had recognised the photo in the brochure.
- People who attended Back to Bransholme then came to DNA (despite performances being in different parts of the city).

### Inner happiness

Because there was no expression on a child's face as she left Slime, we suspected that she maybe hadn't enjoyed it. But after speaking to her parent, we discovered she had seen the show previously with the same expression. Her parents thought it had been a waste of time. But the child had spoken incessantly about it afterwards, and spotting it in the festival brochure, insisted on going again. This brings us to learn that we cannot make judgements based purely on physical expression and that having conversations to supplement observation is certainly worthwhile.

## Sharing with the group

The different ways people shared with their group – or were aware of group dynamics.

- Children leaving Fagin's Twist at Wilberforce for the interval were trying out the dance moves they'd seen with one another.
- We were sitting quite close to a table of what appeared to be two couples at a Secret Gig. One of the men appeared to not be enjoying the show. He was uncomfortable or unhappy at certain points – though this reduced as the performance went on. This did not dampen the enjoyment for those on his table who appeared to be having a great time. When we spoke to this man on his way out, he noted

that the fact his group had enjoyed it still mattered to him.

## Audiences shape the show

Both Truth to Power Café and High Horse at the May 2019 Festival felt different from previous shows. They very much relied on people participating and making the show.

- At Truth to Power, local people telling their stories provoked a discussion around how this changed people's perception of them.
- At High Horse, the whole performance changed through the week, becoming better with each performance. Both of the main actors developed their characters throughout the show run and adapted well to different audience sizes and various levels of willingness of the audience to interact.

## THEME THREE: CHALLENGING THE AUDIENCE

**Sometimes the audience was challenged by a show – eliciting positive and negative reactions.**

- At Truth to Power Café, the truth may not always have been comfortable. One contributor told his truth about his trans journey and how he feels about society etc. Some members of the audience listened whilst bowing their heads. The audience sat still and silently throughout until the end of the speech and then clapped raucously. The middle aged gentleman behind me said, "Bloody hell, that must have been so hard to do". The lady next to me reaches for another tissue.
- At High Horse, the rules did not always make for an easy listen. "Parents should not get drunk at children's parties" and "Adults should not drink and drive" provoked horrified reactions from the relevant parents.
- At the Secret Gig at William Gemmell, although the majority of audience members enjoyed the performances, for some the challenge of LaLa Piano Bar appeared too much. They could not comfortably watch the show. This resulted in homophobic and sexist remarks, heckling, gesturing and physical threats, observed by us and the staff team, both in the main room and outside in the smoking area.

### Girl under the table

We chatted to a lady with a young girl at the end of a performance of The Allotment at North Bransholme Community Centre. At the start of the show, when the children were moving into their first zones, the girl ran under a nearby table.

We spotted a nearby Absolutely Cultured volunteer about to give her some drawing paper. The volunteer got down on the floor, to the child's level, and talked quietly to her. The mother started to talk to her daughter, and the volunteer walked away. A cast member also quietly talked to her. After about ten minutes, she was coaxed out by her mother and got herself involved, though on the periphery.

The funniest and most ironic moment was when the girl pulled a banana out from her bag and started to eat it while wandering in the middle zone, only minutes after singing 'Happy Birthday' to the bananas.

At the end, when talking to her mother, she told us that she was really pleased with the response from both the volunteer and cast member, making her little girl feel special. At the end when given the yellow token the little girl put it in the 'yes' box with the comment "can we come again?"

Mum had told us that she had been surprised that at home, on the morning of this performance, her little girl had got out her red hat she had made at Mr Satie - Made In Paper, (from the October 2018 Festival) without any prompting.

This is an example of volunteers and cast members coming together and taking the audience members' experience to the next level of enjoyment and comfort.

### THEME FOUR: FAMILIARITY AND FANS

**We are beginning to see that Back to Ours is developing a following in a number of ways – people are coming to more than one show and looking out for the next Festival.**

At DNA, some people who had seen multiple shows even described themselves as 'groupies'!

We identified five elements of this theme:

- Looking for the next Festival
- Fans of the performers
- Fans of the Secret Gigs
- Knowing Back To Ours
- Knowing Chat to Ours

#### Looking for the next Festival

People are aware of Back to Ours and look out for the next festival.

- A mum and son from Anlaby had been to lots of shows at Back to Ours Festivals. The son loves them and always asks what's on at Back to Ours when it's half-term. Mum told us that she loves the relaxed atmosphere – friendly and without the formality of 'proper' theatres. Mum also said she likes the way Back to Ours shows are all different but always good - and the prices are great.

#### Fans of the performers

We encountered people coming to see a specific show (A Super Happy Story) and work by a specific writer (Delicate Flowers), as well as some of the bands.

#### That story is my story

One group of four young adults were attending a performance of A Super Happy Story because two of them had seen it previously in Huddersfield and they wanted their friends to see it. They were not aware of Back to Ours but took a copy of the brochure.

The leader of the group, who had seen the show on at least three occasions previously, was full of praise for the production. They believed it to be 'the best and only play I've ever seen that deals with depression in the right way – it's so true and so me. It tells my story.'

## Fans of the Secret Gigs

Because of the format, The Secret Gigs are developing ‘fans’ – people who like the excitement of not knowing who they might see.

- We met four people at the Willows Secret Gig who were enthusiastic about the format - ‘Did we choose the right one?’. This was in relation both Secret Gigs taking place on the same night; one at William Gemmell Social Club and one at Willows Social Club.

## Knowing Back To Ours

If the audience know Back to Ours, they know what to expect and are better able to enjoy themselves:

- Just before the end of the final morning session of High Horse, a mum, daughter and son, when told we were closing for lunch, said they’d come back at 2 pm for the first afternoon performance. Having spent an hour and a half whiling away the time at North Point, they did return. The boy has additional needs and is being assessed for ADHD. His sister is extremely reserved and lacks confidence. But they are familiar with Back to Ours, the Living Room and the Chat to Ours volunteers, so had no hesitation in entering the area and taking part.

## Knowing Chat to Ours

Seeing Chat to Ours regularly means the audiences are used to giving us their feedback.

- When audience members were asked if they would take home questionnaires for completion and posting, people responded positively especially when they were told it would help funding applications. Being told they could win shopping vouchers also helped. We have never noticed this any more so than at Back to Bransholme. When audiences saw that we were handing out surveys, they came over to ask what we were giving out and asked if they could have one. When told what they were, they still happily took them away.

### The Boxer

Before the show, a member of Chat to Ours had met a female audience member in the bar area. Along with her father-in-law and husband, they approached the same person after the show to provide feedback on her experience. She wanted to ensure that we passed on their sincere thanks to everyone at Back to Ours for showing Delicate Flowers at Willow Social Club.

Her father-in-law had recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and had been a professional boxer at a very high level in his younger days. She commented that his facial expressions and interaction levels during the show had been heightened, and that he had passed comment on and praised the actress’ boxing skills.

Other family members were staggered at his recall of memories and level of concentration, which he had not demonstrated in weeks.

## **SAMPLE OBSERVATION: CHORES, MAY 2019 FESTIVAL**

Everyone comes in and takes their seats, avoiding the stage area and filling up the seats from the front. Chatting happens between families and I hear a mum explaining the 'expectations' of the theatre to her daughter aged around 4: 'You need to sit on your seat, listen to what is happening and not shout out, that's what happens at the theatre.'

The lights go out and the theatre is dark. The family in front of me gasp. A loud announcement happens, a toddler clings to the person next to him. The actors appear, a little girl (5 years old?) shouts out: 'They are here!' Her parents smile at her and then exchange smiles.

The voiceover of the mother plays and the actors respond with petulant stances and exhale. Multiple children of various ages, and adults mimic the noises. A mum in front turns to her daughter (8 years old?) and says, 'That's you'.

The actors communicate with each other and the audience with noises, a girl (8 years?) shouts 'Don't they speak English?' Mum notices and does not respond. Later on during the show, the same girl shouts, 'Are you speaking Japanese? Why don't you just speak English?' Her mum does not respond.

The actors juggle separately and as a team, and a toddler squeals, he shouts what sounds like 'Juggle.' The actors squirt each other with water, and the various children (across age ranges) and families jump out of their seats and jump up and down. One girl aged around 4 years old gets out of her seat and hides underneath. Her mum notices and smiles.

An 18 month old lays on mum throughout the performance watching the action. Children giggle and laugh in the appropriate place for the laugh to happen throughout the performance.

The actors at a couple of points during the show pretend to 'fall' into the audience – whilst riding a unicycle, when running with material on their faces – and each time the audience inhale and move as if they were going to be impacted. And audibly exhale as the actors' retreat.

A little girl (4 years?) says 'This is the most funniest one that I have ever seen.' She continues to laugh heartily and smile at her mum and dad. She says this during the water spray scene when she gets sprayed from the stage. In the next minute the actor joins the audience and sits next to that little girl. She sits still and stares at him, she turns her head and her body remains in the same position. When he gets up, she says to mum, 'He sat next to me didn't he?' The mum smiles.

The actors pretend to be asleep and a dad behind me says 'Shhh' and then shuffles on his seat. He laughs heartily at the actors pretending to hit each other and his wife laughs with him. The two girls sat with them still and continue to focus on the action.

The actors stack blocks on top of each other and pretend to fall asleep on them, during this scene one of the actors pretends to fall off and a gentleman in a wheelchair at the front of the auditorium laughs very loud and continues to do so, the actor notices and smiles at the man. Later in the show the actors pretend to be dead and the man in the wheelchair laughs again. The actor again interacts with the gentleman.

Throughout the performance a couple of children of varying ages shuffle in their chairs, shifting their wait to the front, getting out of their seats and standing in front of their seats. A boy about 8 years gets up and walks up and down the aisle near the back several times.

Every member of the audience claps and some make noises, such as 'Woooo!', 'Yeah!' People file out of the theatre and wait in a queue to have a photo with the actors. Several little girls leave the theatre with an arm full of toilet paper from the performance.

Sam Chegwin

# Conclusions

We hope this report gives a sense of what we observed and talked to people about during the four Festivals.

As we've said in each of our reports, there were lots of good things happening and positive reactions but also a few things to improve on and learn from.

We, as a group, support everything that Back to Ours is founded on and strives for. We hope that this Highlights Report provides a useful summary of our findings so far.

## SUMMARY

### The Festival Experience:

#### 1. Marketing and communications

- Word of Mouth and 'the internet' were key.
- People came back for more.
- The brochures worked.
- Tweaks to the marketing had an impact.

#### 2. Buying tickets

- Broadly the ticketing worked.
- People loved the low prices.
- Ticketing glitches manifest in several ways.

#### 3. Location and venue

- Familiar and nearby venues work.
- Comfort and good facilities are crucial.
- The right performance space matters.
- Signage needs to be clear.
- 'Unorthodox' venues can pose unique challenges.
- Using a school as a venue has positives.

#### 4. The Welcome

- A friendly entrance area and greeting sets the right tone.
- Looking after the audience makes a difference.
- Having time and space means better feedback.
- Accommodating the Polish language made shows more accessible.

#### 5. Entertainment around the event

- Pre-show entertainment adds to overall enjoyment.
- Post-show entertainment rounds off a great experience.

## Themes

- 1. Audience interactions.** The role of audience members in interpreting and supporting each other's experience of the shows.
- 2. Wow!** The intensity of the experience for some people and how emotional it could be.
- 3. Challenging the audience.** Sometimes the audience was challenged by a show.
- 4. Familiarity and fans.** Back to Ours is developing a following in many ways, and people are coming back for more.

"At the end of the performance there was prolonged clapping and a standing ovation. Again, many audience members provided spontaneous comments: 'amazing', 'brilliant', 'absolutely brilliant', 'really good'..."

Observation of Fagin's Twist, 27 October 2018