

# **COLLECTIVE ENCOUNTERS' ARTS ADVENTURE PROGRAMME**

**Creative projects for care-experienced  
children and young people**





# COLLECTIVE ENCOUNTERS

Collective Encounters is an arts charity specialising in theatre for social change with a creative and participatory programme that stretches across the Liverpool City Region. Collective Encounters believe creative practice can foster spaces of inclusivity, openness and connection.

Since 2011 we have been delivering participatory arts activity for care-experienced children and young people, following a pilot project delivered in partnership with the Liverpool Children in Care Council.

We work in close collaboration with local authority Children's Services in the Liverpool City Region. Referrals are predominantly made by Independent Reviewing Officers and Social Workers. We also promote the projects via our already established network of Foster Carers, Kinship Carers and School Safeguarding Officers.

# OUR CREATIVE PROJECTS WITH CARE-EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

Collective Encounters' programme *Arts Adventures* offers opportunities for care-experienced children and young people to engage with high quality arts provision. Workshops (including drama, music, dance, visual arts, and creative writing) are delivered by professional artists with expertise in working with young people and communities.

Participatory projects are delivered three times a year in the school holidays. Short projects take place in the Easter and Christmas breaks, and an extended four-week project is facilitated during the summer holidays.



# WHY COLLECTIVE ENCOUNTERS

We are the only non-statutory organisation locally who consistently offer participatory provision every year for care-experienced children and young people. In 2019, our work in this area was recognised with the youth focus, North West Citizens Award for Best Social Project.

In addition to artistic activities our creative programme offers:

- Accredited Arts Awards courses
- Cultural trips across Liverpool City Region
- Mentoring and signposting to relevant progression activities



# COLLECTIVE ENCOUNTERS & CARE-EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

**2012**

Partnership with Whitewood & Fleming (Youth Music funded) builds organisation's approach to working with care-experienced CYP creatively.

**2013 - 2024**

Annual Arts Adventurers programme for care-experienced CYP rolled out & partnerships developed with regions Children's Services & care agencies.

**437**

Care-experienced CYP have engaged in Collective Encounters creative projects over 11 years.

**19**

Children's Services & care agencies currently in Collective Encounters' network of services who support the annual Arts Adventures programmes.

**960**

Hours of creative activity has built care-experienced children and young people's skills, confidence and social connections.

**22**

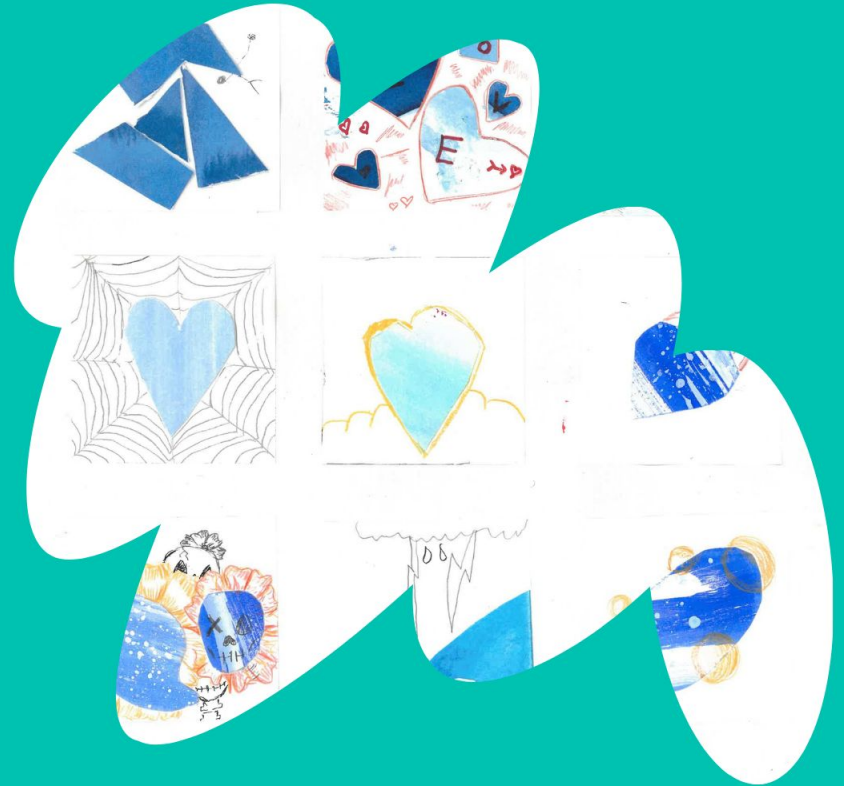
Community artists, theatre-makers and musicians trained in working creatively with care-experienced CYP.

# GROW STRONG: SONG LYRICS FROM CARE-EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

Do you know what it's like to grow strong?  
Hoping that today don't go so wrong.  
Now I understand my emotions,  
I can ride a wave in the ocean.

I'm just trying to understand how you feel,  
because the way I feel about you is real.

If you can open up to me,  
we can find a better way to be.  
Let me open the door to my heart,  
to keep us from falling apart.



# OUR APPROACH TO WORKING WITH CARE-EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

We co-design and deliver school holiday creative courses that build confidence, develop skills and nurture talent, connect young people with similar experiences and enable care-experienced young people to communicate their experiences of care to a wider audience.



Our bespoke approach actively responds to the needs of young people, their families and carers. This responsive process is deeply rooted in participatory methods and social justice, ensuring that the voices of young people are central to the evolution of each project.

Collective Encounters' work embodies a **trauma-informed approach** to participatory practice.



# BARRIERS TO ARTS PARTICIPATION



There are significant barriers which care experienced children and young people face when it comes to arts participation.

Research completed by A New Direction, a not-for-profit organisation working to create opportunities for increased agency in children and young people, shows that social, physical, psychological and economic factors create barriers for young people looking to engage with arts and culture.

(A New Direction, Cultural Capital Research, 2018)

At Collective Encounters we recognise these factors are exacerbated for young people in care. We also understand that institutional and cultural barriers may prohibit young people from accessing and participating in the arts. We work to break down these barriers.



# LANGUAGE CREATES REALITIES

Language has a significant impact on how care experienced children and young people feel\*. Professionals have a responsibility to support and advocate for children and young people in care.

- Professionalisation can lead to depersonalisation
- Language creates barriers to engagement
- Disrespectful and distancing language creates stigma and shame

Instead, young people must be empowered to find and use their voice. Young people must hold and own the narrative of their stories and lives, and professionals should help achieve this by challenging the depersonalising use of acronyms and other systems-focussed language.

Collective Encounters believe the arts can play a meaningful role in supporting young people to create their own language and use imagination to express themselves.

\*The Promise, Scotland's Independent Care Review

# BENEFITS OF CREATIVITY

Research demonstrates that those who are excluded and have experience of discrimination are more likely to thrive if their experiences and needs are listened to and acknowledged (Gaskell, 'Young Care Leavers Perspectives on the Importance of Care', *Children & Society Journal*, 2010).

Collective Encounters' work shows that the arts play an important role in creating spaces where cared for young people feel heard.

Selina Busby writes:

Art and specifically theatre, provides a lens through which individuals and groups can process and reflect on their lived experiences of the world and offer a means of understanding and articulating the complexities that surround us both implicitly and explicitly. Theatre-making with aims of social justice enables people to find new ways of communicating their views, their discontent and their wishes. [...] Theatre is one tool in our armoury that may help us to relate to our complex world and to improve insecurity, mistrust, exclusion and responsibility

(Busby, *Applied Theatre: A Pedagogy of Utopia*, 2021, p. 9).

# BENEFITS OF CREATIVITY

Participation in artistic and creative activities has multiple profound benefits to the lives of young people.

Care-experienced children and young people have told us they want free social and creative activities during the school holidays as well as opportunities to come together.

Our project aims to lift up young voices through creative expression, be a place of fun and play, build community and connect, improve wellbeing, raise young people's confidence and self esteem and discover fantastic cultural opportunities in Liverpool.



# IMPACT IN 2023-24

**28**

Care-experienced CYP took part in at least one Arts Adventure programme

**93%**

Returned to participate on more than one day; 29% took part across more than one school holiday

**100%**

Reported that they made new friends and felt heard and included; 69% reported that they tried something new

**6**

Care-experienced CYP joined regular groups and/or applied for further study as a result of the programme

**140**

Hours of creative activity and over 500 healthy meals provided for care-experienced CYP

**11**

Community artists, theatre-makers and support workers trained in working creatively with care-experienced CYP.

## COMMENTS FROM CARERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

*"It's enabled friendship and connection"*

*"She can feel excluded sometimes but not here"*

*"Receiving praise has given him a boost"*

*"They realise they are not the only ones to have experienced care. It's a relief"*

*"I've witnessed a huge surge of confidence during the project"*

# JOY & CONNECTION

We went to the Everyman Theatre to see The Rock 'n Roll Pantomime of Cinderella. The show involves lots of audience participation, which meant the young people were able to sing and dance throughout. There was one particular 'magic moment' when all of the young people were up out of their seats singing and dancing at the same time. One young person had stayed very close to another young person from her foster home for the entirety of the project, however, during the pantomime she made friends with a young person sitting next to her and they were dancing together throughout the show.





## I am

sister and dancer

I am a dog lover

uncle and a son and also a brother

a sister, cousin, and a granddaughter

a creative with the power to imagine

I am

a kind hearted person

smart and strong

a funny friend

I am

Moroccan

a pianist

I have great style

I am

an artist

neurodivergent

a student

I don't need to be modest

## I want

more pets

to be old enough to move house

to see more places in the future

for the old things I used to have back

my parents

I want

the people I love to be happy

and feel safe around me

happiness and peace for the world

to help people in times of need

I wish for people to be free

I want

to become a famous singer

to see 'The Script' and 'aitch,

wait until you see me on stage!

I want you to believe you are creative

in your own special way

I want

education

to succeed in my GCSEs

I will rise to the occasion

## I will

try to get a good job

and have a good life with a nice home

be an accomplished dance teacher

I will help others to believe in themselves

I will

start being more kind to my family

be caring and be successful

I will not allow my emotions

to influence my decisions

I will

remain focussed, still & calm

be patient if I have to wait

to achieve my dream

I will be me!



Group poem written by young  
people during Collective Encounters  
summer Arts Adventure 2024

# ADVOCATING ON BEHALF OF CARE-EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

CLICK HERE TO LISTEN



A podcast player interface for a podcast episode. It features a circular profile picture of a man with short brown hair, wearing a light blue shirt, set against a purple circular background. To the right of the profile picture is a small purple circle with the word "MERSEY" in white. Below the profile picture, the text "06:00 - 10:00" is displayed in white. Underneath that, the name "Kevin Duala" is written in a larger white font. Below the name, the text "Paul Beesley sits in (07/11/2024)" is shown in a smaller white font. At the bottom of the player, there is a progress bar consisting of a horizontal line with an orange dot indicating the current position.

# CASE STUDY



On week two of the four week summer project, a young person called Abigail\* joined the group. It is difficult for young people to enter a space where bonds have already been made. At first Abigail was extremely shy and quiet, she would often choose to sit alone in the workshop room or at lunch. When it came to creative activities such as writing and acting Abigail was reluctant to perform. For instance, she was quite happy working on a piece of creative writing but when it came to performing she would ask a staff member to read her work aloud.

At the end of week 2, Abigail began to make her own bonds with a number of young people in the group; this seemed to boost her confidence. Gradually over time Abigail became more engaged with elements of performance.

In week 3, Abigail thoroughly enjoyed a songwriting session that was carried out by a guest music leader. The following day, one of our support artists built on this by running a rap writing and performing session. Abigail wrote her own rap and confidently performed it for the rest of the group while they cheered her on. Abigail told our support artist that this had ignited a new interest in making music.

At the end of week four, the young people showcased all the skills and performance techniques they had learned and practiced over the course of the project. During this sharing session, Abigail confidently performed her rap for a sizable audience of carers, parents, social workers and others. Her social worker was extremely impressed by Abigail's performance particularly how she had overcome her shyness. Abigail also completed an Arts Award Bronze Level, building on her repertoire of creative skills and artistic practice.

\*Name anonymised to protect anonymity

# RESPONSES TO OUR WORK

Through group reflection, monitoring and evaluation we have evidence that this process works. We are able to evidence young people's growth and change in a number of ways. For example,

- Foster carers, grandparents and social workers tell us young people talk about our programme at home and look forward to each day.
- Session leaders and artists observe that the young people demonstrate a greater confidence, discuss their thoughts and feelings more openly and importantly make connections with other young people.
- Young people tell us that the arts is now 'their thing'
  - that they want to sing and make music, or dance or act!



# FEEDBACK FROM OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

*"I went to see my first Theatre show. Maybe I could be up there one day!"*

*"I learned how to dance and how to relate to people"*

*"You can always be yourself"*

*"There are so many friendly people that bring you to life"*

*"My favourite part was working together to write our own song"*



# CONTACT

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