



Coming together - the importance of children and young people connecting



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1. Introduction



'Coming together - the importance of children and young people connecting' VOICES and Culture Bridge North East webinar Tuesday 15th June, 4-6pm

The VOICES project is working with over 1,000 young people across the North East to understand the needs of children and young people aged 5–18 living in poverty in and through the pandemic. Young people are telling us that what they have missed most over the past year has been the opportunity to spend time with friends and wider family and to engage in a variety of activities. VOICES is working with Culture Bridge North East and partner organisations across the North East to respond to this and ask what can be done now to support children and young people?

Our webinar on the 15th June 2021 presented findings from VOICES about what children and young people are telling us and discussed the ways in which we are working with schools, organisations and policy makers to enact change. Culture Bridge North East talked about their work connecting cultural organisations and the education sector so that children and young people can have access to great arts and cultural opportunities throughout the North East and we heard from practitioners working in schools, arts and culture, and play and youth work who have continued working with children and young people throughout the pandemic and found ways for young people to connect.

This publication shares some of the highlights, full presentations are available to view on our VOICES website: <https://www.voicesproject.co.uk/resources/>

VOICES: Social interaction findings and challenge to stakeholders

The VOICES project has spoken to over 1000 children and young people in focus groups and received more than 200 children's writing and drawings. A consistent finding reported has been how much children have missed friends and family.

'It was nice to see them but sad, I felt like my cousins were in a cage'

'Before lockdown I had just started playing out with my friends but now I hardly see them'

'Not able to keep in touch with friends cos I don't have everyone's number'

Children and young people have relied on connecting digitally with friends and family but it has not been the same as before. Despite often learning something new in the various lockdowns, there have been so many activities that children and young people have missed. Boredom has been expressed by so many that we spoke to. Missing doing the things they like doing has been such a common theme - and a large part of this is making and seeing friends. Many children and young people know how much they get from activities socially, in terms of wellbeing and mental health and in terms of skills. But also some have taken up new skills and interests – karate, cooking, Spanish, drawing, basketball and a lot more - that they want to continue learning face to face with others.

- 'It gets boring just looking at the screen and you want to go outside'
- 'All I do is go on my phone – it drains me and I get a headache'
- 'Going into dancing helped but doing it online doesn't help'
- 'I used to go swimming, it calmed me down and got me prepared, its hard not to do that anymore'
- 'Still doing drama online, where I got to see my friends, it's hard not to see them, it's not the same online'
- 'I would have been out all day playing football'
- 'I missed going to a museum with my friends and a park'
- 'I want to keep up my new hobbies and things I have learnt'
- 'My driving lessons stopped'
- 'I've started to read again'
- 'I've started a little business making resin keyrings'

VOICES recommends that all children and young people should be offered an increased access to a range of out of school activities, to be provided through many different kinds of organisations including schools and charities. Most of these should be free and universally accessible but some should be free and targeted at particular groups especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and children with disabilities. Organisations that work with children should involve children in the selection of activities. This report of our 15th June 2021 webinar shows just a few of the high quality activities that there are for children in the NE in schools, cultural organisations and charities that focus on children having access to interacting with others, developing skills and friendships, and having the opportunity to express themselves in the world.

The graphic features a teal background with two white speech bubbles. The bubble on the left is larger and contains the text "We've missed out on trips... and assemblies... when you get an award and everyone claps you feel really good about yourself". The bubble on the right is smaller and contains the text "We can't play with friends in different classes". A small teal speech bubble with the word "VOICES" in white is positioned at the bottom left of the larger bubble. The word "VOICES" is in a bold, sans-serif font.

VOICES

“
We've missed out on trips... and
assemblies... when you get
an award and everyone claps you
feel really good about yourself
”

“
We can't play with friends in
different classes
”

voicesproject.co.uk

2. VOICES



VOICES is managed and delivered by Children North East and Newcastle University and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), as part of UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) rapid response to Covid-19.

The project uses a co-production approach to find out what children and young people's lives are like now and communicate this to policy leaders and practitioners. Our core focus on children and young people's own views is supported by interviews with practitioners working in schools and community groups and with policy leaders.

VOICES aims:

- To document and analyse the key challenges of the Covid19 pandemic on CYP living in poverty
- To explore how schools and services are responding to needs of CYP living in poverty
- To facilitate changes in policy and practice in response to evidence of the needs of CYP living in poverty

Project team

Newcastle University: Professor Liz Todd, Lucy Tiplady and Lydia Wysocki

Children North East: Luke Bramhall, Cathryn Gathercole, Suzanne Butler, Andrew Thorp, Gwen Dalziel, Janice Holloway, Saffia Solomon and Paula Hamilton

3. Culture Bridge North East

About us

Culture Bridge North East (CBNE) is one of 10 Bridge organisations in England funded by Arts Council England. Our role is to support the strategic development of arts and cultural education by, with and for children and young people.

We want everyone growing up in the region to have a childhood rich in arts and culture and believe that arts and culture in education can create a spark, which will inspire future artists, performers, makers and curators.

Arts Award

Arts Award supports children and young people to develop as artists and arts leaders. It deepens engagement with arts and culture, develops both creative and leadership skills, and importantly, Arts Award leads to a national qualification. Through its five levels, children and young people can explore any art form.

CBNE works in partnership with The Customs House and we provide advice to organisations whether you're getting started with Arts Award, developing it further, or would just like to know more.

Artsmark

Artsmark is the creative quality standard for schools accredited by Arts Council England. It provides a clear framework for teachers to plan, develop and evaluate arts, culture and creativity across the curriculum.

CBNE works in partnership with The Forge to support schools at all stages of their Artsmark journey, providing training, advice, and introductions to leading cultural organisations.

Artsmark partners are a network of arts and cultural organisations devoted to bringing great arts and cultural opportunities to children and young people. They support Artsmark registered schools on their journey to embed arts and culture across the curriculum.

CPD programmes

Our Cultural leadership in Education programme, in partnership with Newcastle University Leadership Centre, supports senior and middle leaders in schools to gain the knowledge, capacity and skills to lead development, inspire colleagues, build partnerships, and to ensure that arts and cultural activity has impact on pupils.

Creative Classrooms is our online CPD programme which gives primary school teachers the confidence and tools to broaden and enhance their curriculum through arts and culture.

We also launched Compendium an online directory of home learning resources, tools case studies and blogs for teachers and pupils.

Secret World of Schools is an opportunity for the cultural sector to explore what is happening currently in schools and gives delegates the knowledge and confidence to deliver their cultural offers to schools.

Our annual conference, Imagine if... explores and showcases cultural education in the North East and beyond. It brings together school leaders, teachers and cultural practitioners to celebrate the work taking place in the region, looks forward, supports the direction of travel and signposts future development.

Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs)

LCEPs bring together representatives from the education, arts and culture sectors to engage more children and young people with high quality arts and culture. CBNE supports the development of these partnerships in every part of the region.

CBNE Fund

Our fund provides grants of up to £1,500 to support collaborations between education and youth settings, arts practitioners and cultural organisations anywhere in the North East. Priority is given to projects, which improve access to high quality arts provision for those who would otherwise face barriers to taking part.

The CBNE fund is managed by the Community Foundation, Tyne and Wear and Northumberland.

Contact us

Visit our website to find out more about CBNE, access the latest news and information about events and programmes:

www.culturebridgenortheast.org.uk



www.culturebridgenortheast.org.uk
bridge@twmuseums.org.uk

4. Connecting children and young people in and through the pandemic

- Creative connections during COVID - Helen Gorsky, Assistant Head Chillingham Road Primary School
- Mortal Fools: Defeating our Worrits Together through collective group experiences and co-creation - Kiz Crosbie, Artistic Director
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Creative Connections during the Covid pandemic

Helen Gorsky, Assistant head, Chillingham Road Primary School

Connection time

- Belonging
- Friendship
- Confidence and self-esteem
- Responsibilities
- Kindness
- Resilience
- Worry
- Anger



Autumn B (message to Y4 parents)

This term Year 4 are taking part in a project with a group of Theatre students from Northumbria University, led by senior lecturer, Dr Kay Hepplewhite. The students are designing drama activities and creating resources for the class around the theme of anti-racism. Their work will be sent to us digitally and we will try it out in school and send them our feedback. As a start we have exchanged letters and pictures to begin to get to know each other. Both students and children are excited about the idea of linking up. This week we received the first batch of letters and Year 4 all wrote wonderful letters about themselves, their families and the things they enjoy, in return.

What does belonging mean?

For **me** it is a feeling of connection to others and a connection to place.

It **means** feeling welcomed and accepted.

It **means** feeling safe enough to be **me**; to show up and contribute!

When everyone in a community experiences this sense of **belonging**, there is a natural shift towards taking care of one another.



This is not research and I have no data to prove the efficacy of this approach.

It was an intuitive response to a challenging situation, which has enabled a group of young children to recognise and talk about their emotions in a non-pathologising way.

Connection time sessions and our school collaboration with Northumbria University created a learning opportunity (and quite a lot of fun) out of a crisis.



MORTAL FOOLS

WE ARE MORTAL FOOLS, A THEATRE, DRAMA AND CREATIVE LEARNING COMPANY WITH CHARITY STATUS.

We specialise in co-creating theatre and creative projects with young people and professional artists. Our work is contemporary and rooted into what is important to young people right now.

Mortal Fools' purpose is to support people to have better interpersonal relationships with one another and we do that through theatre and drama. Our work became even more important during a year when COVID forced us to physically distance from one another.

Our team showed ingenuity and resilience ensuring that we continued to have a positive impact on the lives of young people in Northumberland and beyond, who really needed us to be there for them.

April 2020– April 2021 highlights:

- Delivered 255 sessions for young people
- Worked regularly with a core 70 young people
- Ran 4 co-created online events, amplifying young people's voices
- Co-created 7 young people's creative projects
- Supported 310 young people's mental health via our online, interactive storytelling Melva game
- Established our Young Leaders Programme, to support young people to be better leaders, activists, allies and socially engaged humans
- Launched our Mortal Fools Online Youth Theatre group for young people outside of Northumberland

MORTAL FOOLS

HIGHLIGHT PROJECTS:

Let Us Tell You is a coming together of young people's powerful voices on film and an invitation to step inside their thought provoking and sometimes imaginary worlds. This project was co-designed with young people as a response to them telling us they felt they had no voice during the pandemic.

So, we worked with them to co-create a film making project. We used a range of co-creation activities, almost all delivered over Zoom, to generate material for film scripts which supported different preferences and interests of the young people. When it came to filming, we designed the filming weekend to be a "creative mental health intervention". The focus was for participants to take part in activities that boosted their wellbeing, while simultaneously, the filmmakers captured the content.

The project focused supporting young people, building their social connections and letting their voices be captured by the camera. The result of this was the two short films **THANK YOU FOR LISTENING** and **MY MONSTER ARRIVED**. The films are available for free on our [YouTube channel](#), together with a [digital resource pack](#) so other groups can use the films to support their young people.

Melva is a creative, fun and accessible way for groups of 7–11-year-olds to explore worries and anxiety, or "Worrits" as Melva calls them. Originally a live show, we have reimagined it into a digital format.

The purpose of the [Melva Digital Programme](#) is to give new ways for children to have shared creative experiences together, and to use them to kick off conversations which explore thoughts, feelings and behaviour that are common to all of us. The Digital Programme, launching September 2021, has versions for both schools and groups to use, as well as for use by families. It has two main parts, a new version of the original theatre play, produced as three parts and as a full-length version, and as an online storytelling game.

The reimagined Melva film, combines the best from live performance with film and animation to create an exciting experience for children as well as teach them ways to manage their own Worrits by relating to Melva's experiences.

The online storytelling game gives the player the role of Melva's giggling voice, helping Melva find her lost best friend, Barnabas. They visit different locations and talk to different characters to find clues. Through playing the game, users learn new practical skills to help them manage their Worrits.

Bye for now...

The last 18 months have certainly been a year of pivoting, growing, creating, an abundance of adventure, learning to get comfortable with discomfort and expecting the unexpected. We are ready to step into this next financial year, stronger, wiser and forever changed.

Follow us on:



@mortalfoolsUK

www.mortalfools.org.uk

www.mortalfools.org.uk



Because growing
up can be hard

Playful Lives



Playful Lives is an initiative that Children North East (CNE) developed during the summer of 2020 in conjunction with the West End School's Trust, the West End Children's Community and Sussed and Able. The programme's mission was to support families post lockdown and in the shadow of Covid-19, to use play as a tool to ease stretched family relationships, promote wellbeing and offer relief to stressed and worried families. CNE Playful Lives in the summer of 2020 was made possible due to funding from StreetGames, the Department for Education (DfE) funded Best Summer Ever programme. This allowed CNE to pilot a model of delivering playful activities with families who were isolated, struggling due to the lockdown and social distancing measures, and were seeking support. Bridgewater School, in the West End of Newcastle, identified and referred families who would benefit from support in playful activities, and were happy to engage with the charity. Once a family was referred they were contacted by CNE and agreed for a team of three play workers to go and visit them once or twice a week over the course of four weeks. The team visited families with resource packs and resources to facilitate playful engagement with the children and encourage, support and provide new and different opportunities for parents and carers to interact and take part in child led and directed play. The Playful Lives project was a way of tackling childhood disadvantage through quality play intervention. Over the course of the Playful Lives pilot, CNE workers engaged with 11 families including 30 children and 15 parents. Over the Easter holidays this year the teams engaged with 25 families and we are looking forward to engaging even more families this summer.



FOOD INSECURITY - WE COMMIT TO WORK TOGETHER TO:

- *Continue to provide holiday hunger support through our amazing *Feast of Fun* network that delivered 86,500 meals and activity packs in 2020
- *Work together with churches, partner organisations, and families to develop sustainable solutions to food poverty
- *Work with our partners and our community to end local food insecurity

LONELINESS & ISOLATION – WE COMMIT TO WORK TOGETHER TO:

- *Continue to support Middlesbrough's over 50's through our *Food & Friendship* groups and *Warm Welcome* network as the world opens up
- *Develop and expand our Intergenerational Work across Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland
- *Develop work with underrepresented people including the young; men; and BAME including 'Walk & Talk' and other wellbeing initiatives

Our Vision of Recovery for All:

To work together with churches, faith-based organisations, & civil society, to strengthen local communities; make positive, lasting change; tackle poverty; & enable everyone to thrive & enjoy life.

FINANCIAL INSECURITY & HOMELESSNESS – WE COMMIT TO WORK TOGETHER TO:

- * Explore ways to continue to deliver, and build on, the Cash COVID Recovery training that reached 1,800+ frontline workers in 2020
- *Continue to work with Depaul UK to deliver support to those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, through *Positive Pathways*
- *Develop partnerships to explore future social housing models

BAME DEVELOPMENT & INTERFAITH WORK – WE COMMIT TO WORK TOGETHER TO:

- *Continue to listen to our BAME/Faith communities and organisations to improve their awareness of, and access to, our services
- *Continue to provide a Forum for organisations working with, and led by, our BAME /Faith communities to work together
- *Continue to be informed by our BAME/Faith communities & organisations to develop initiatives to address issues they identify



4. Further Information and keep in touch

<https://www.voicesproject.co.uk/>

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