

Crawley's CREATIVE PLAYGROUND



Evaluation Report 2022-26



Closer To My Dreams, Chad Taylor. Credit: Leyla Guler



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

Introduction

"I can't believe this is happening in Crawley"
Attendee, The Relaxed Concert by RPO

What is Creative Playground?

Creative Playground is an Arts Council England (ACE) Creative People & Programme (CPP) in Crawley, West Sussex. CPPs focus on parts of the country where involvement in creativity and culture is significantly below the national average. The CPP approach empowers residents to decide what kind of creative activity they want to experience where they live.

Creative Playground is principally funded by National Lottery funding administered by ACE. This report covers the 25-26 financial year (April 1 to March 31), with additional exploration of how the programme has developed over the past four years.

Who makes up Creative Playground?

Creative Playground is driven by lots of different people, including:

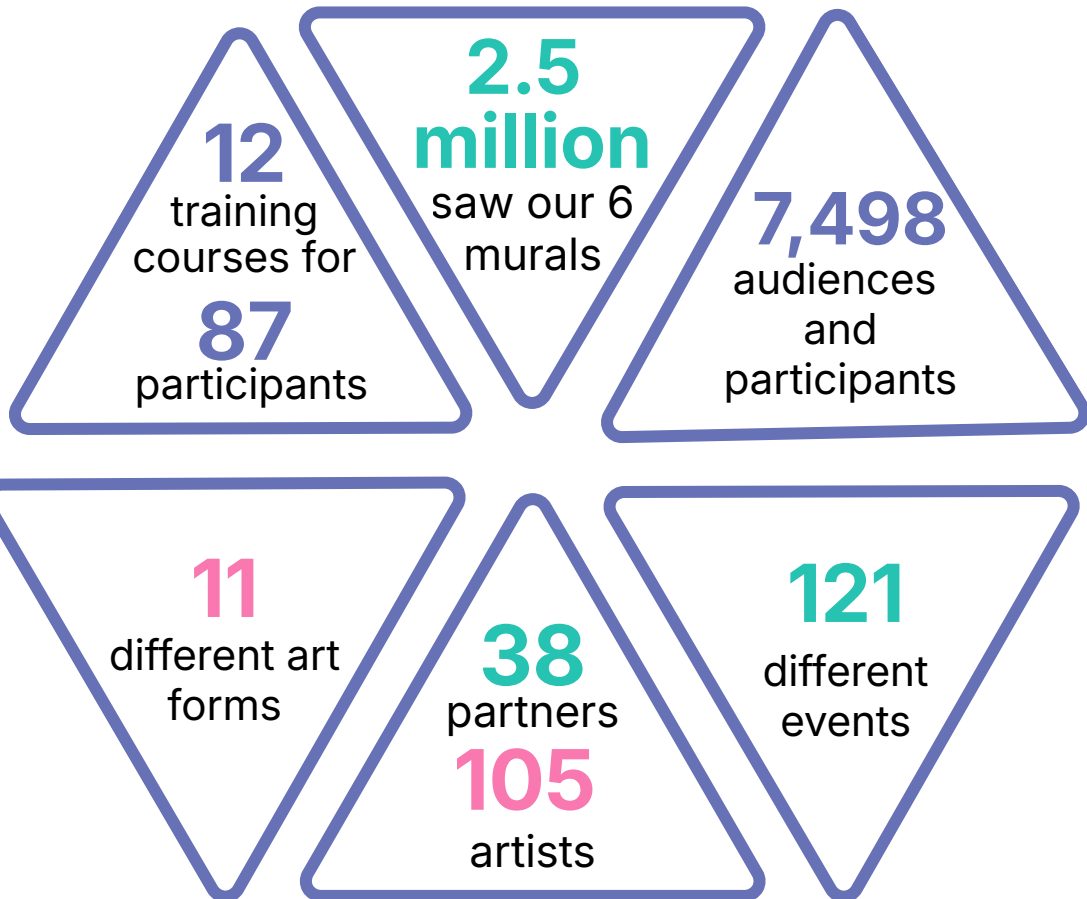
- **Playmakers** - volunteers who help decide what the programme is.
- **Community Connectors** - local freelancers who help connect us with local communities.
- **Core Consortium** - a group of organisations that form the governing body for the project. Between 2022-26, Manor Royal Business District was the lead organisation. During this period other members were Crawley Community Action, Freeshop Bewbush, Sussex LGBT (Previously Crawley), The Hawth Theatre, Caridon Housing and Tamil Learning Centre.
- **Creative Crawley** is the charity that manages the programme on a day to day basis, with a team of paid staff and freelance specialists.

Report structure and page numbers

This report contains both a detailed review of Creative Playground in 25-26, and an overview of the four year period from 2022 to 2026.

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2025-26 in Numbers



Where and Who?

Of our audiences and participants...





4.81 out of 5
average rating for Creative
Playground Events

2025 - 26 Financials

£355,123
turn over



£63,120
support in kind

Data was gathered from feedback surveys, vox pops and case studies

Crawley's
**CREATIVE
PLAYGROUND**



2022-26

3.7 million
mural
engagement

29,169
audiences and
participants

374
events and
activities

62
partners

233
artists



Shreya Kallingal at the Open Day in October 2025. Credit: Ian Greenland

Review of 25-26

Data sources

The data in this report is primarily drawn from the following sources:

- A survey that respondents are asked to fill in after taking part in an event (online or in-person). **382 responses.**
- Data from four surveys using the Impact & Insight platform mandated by Arts Council England. This includes responses from participants and Creative Playground staff, which are analysed separately. **82 responses.**

Additional sources include:

- Logs of attendance and participation compiled after every activity.
- Reflections from the Creative Playground team at four quarterly reflection sessions.
- Case studies and other verbal or written feedback from participants and partners.

"I feel that now I am involved with Creative Crawley, my ideas of making Crawley better will be heard properly because it is a group that has connections with things like the council. When you are involved with Creative Crawley you will have a 100% more chance of getting heard." **Mark, Playmaker 2025**

"It's amazing what you are doing for Crawley, the staff are so welcoming, I enjoyed it so much." Attendee, Open Day



Gateway to the World, Alec Saunders Credit: Rosie Powell

Business plan targets

As part of the Business Plan for 25-26, Creative Playground set SMART targets against four key aims. This section reviews how well the programme has performed against these targets.

Aim 1: More people are regularly engaging in the arts and culture in Crawley as audiences, participants, makers, producers and curators

1. There are increased levels of creative activity across the town particularly in neighbourhoods in the West of Crawley

7,498 people attended or took part in 25-26 events (target: 5,152). This is a lower figure than 24-25 due to the R&D nature of 25-26, building towards the larger town wide festival in subsequent years.

Creative Playground targeted 60% of engagement from the west of Crawley. Ultimately this target was missed, with 51% of total engagement in 25-26 from RH11 (west of Crawley) postcodes. Nevertheless, this was a significant increase from the 31% figure in 24-25.

Specific targets were set for specific events and activities. The following strands had higher engagement than targeted:

Foundation (participatory activities that involve listening to and learning from each other through creative acts)

Saturday Sessions - Target 470; Actual 1,907; **Playmakers** - Target 90; Actual 611;

Victoria Melody/ Freeshop project - Target 300; Actual 459

Business plan targets

Beacon (big commissions and events that connect with existing Crawley moments, national events and/or that reach 500 - 10000+ audiences and participants)

Crawley Murals - Target 1.2m engagements; Actual 2,643,548; **Playground Tour** - Target 800 child audiences; Actual 2,179; **R&D activities for Town Wide Festival** - Target 100; Actual 407

2. There is a greater diversity of people seeing and taking part in the programme particularly from under-represented demographics.

Data suggests that Creative Playground exceeded targets for four of the five target demographics. However, engaging 16 to 25 year olds - both in terms of raw audience numbers and survey responses - requires further work.

Group	Target (% audience)	Actual
Under 16s	21%	Audience for events specifically targeted at under 16s was 3,171 (42% of engagements, excluding murals)
16 to 25 year olds	10%	3% (survey respondents)
60+ years old	12%	25% (survey respondents)
Global Majority	22%	26.1% (survey respondents)
Disabled and neurodiverse people	12%	11% disabled, 23% neurodiverse (survey respondents)

3. People report that taking part in Creative Playground activities means they are more likely to engage in the arts again

There is strong evidence of this. The average response to the statement **"I would like to see / take part in something similar again"** was 4.78/ 5 (strongly agree). This represents an increase from 4.64 in 24-25.

Business plan targets

Aim 2: Creative Playground is delivering high quality arts and culture and excellent approaches to engaging local communities

4. People report the programme to be high quality

There is strong evidence that participants consider the programme to be of high quality. The average response to the statement **"How would you rate your experience overall"** was 4.84/5 (strongly agree). This is a marginal increase from 4.79 in 24-25.

Creative Playground targeted collaboration with at least 10 artists/creatives with demonstrable track records. This was achieved through key artistic partners including Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Forthwrite Festival, African Night Fever, The Place, Ceyda Tanc, Theatre Centre, Chad Taylor and individual artist practitioners Victoria Melody, Vicki Dela Amedume, Brigitte Aphrodite, Cee Boulaqui, Woodzy and Mah-e-Nau Rafiq.

5. Approaches to community engagement are effective and valued by local people

Participants rated the programme 4.76/5 for **"It is important that it is happening here"** and 4.76/5 for **"It provides an important addition to the cultural life of the area"**.

Creative Playground raised more than £60k in support in kind in 25-26, including at least 50% from Crawley-based supporters, including Crawley College, County Mall, Charis Centre, West Sussex County Council and Crawley Borough Council, evidencing the demand for and practical support of the work.

6. Creative Playground, an action learning project, uses feedback to try new approaches to community engagement

This year, despite lower overall audience numbers, Creative Playground and Flying Geese were able to gather feedback from 464 people, an increase from 427 in 24-25. This is thanks to flexible data collection methods, including short paper surveys for people less likely to complete the full online survey or Illuminate diversity questions and face to face evaluation support from Playmakers helping gather responses. Building towards the Town Wide Festival in 2027, new approaches were tried in order to gather community feedback and shape the programme, including inviting prominent artists (e.g. Vicki Dela Amedume) to Playmaker Feasts. Playmaker Feasts received strong feedback via Impact & Insight surveys, with a rating of 0.97/1 given by participants for wanting to attend a similar event again.

Aim 3: The Crawley community is shaping the artistic and cultural offer and learning from Creative Playground

7. Local residents (Playmakers) are involved in decision making

92 Playmakers (target 90) participated in shaping the programme in 25-26, via two Playmaker Open Days, four Playmaker Feasts and five Community Programmers Meetings to help shape the Town Wide Festival. A new Playmaker group will be formed to shape the Town Wide Festival.

Business plan targets

8. Local people learn new skills through formal and informal training and deliver their own creative activity

The Drive programme of training for Playmakers and other local people involved 3 events for 45 people.

The Boost initiative of investment in small scale creative ideas involved two commissions for 285 people. Boost is being re-evaluated for the next phase of Creative Playground's work.

9. We work with schools, colleges and YP orgs to deliver opportunities for creative expression and pathways into the creative industries

This year's Playground tour of contemporary dance in schools reached 2,179, far exceeding the target of 800.

45 students connected with Creative Playground at the Crawley College freshers' fair, plus another 17 visited the County Mall space for a tour and info on how to get involved.

There were 33 opportunities for local people to undertake paid work on the programme - 18 welcome team regulars, two young creatives as workshop assistants, five Creative programmers, two Community connectors, three welcome team upskilled to facilitate Come With Us Trips, and three assisting on the film project.

Aim 4: The programme is delivering against the Theory of Change

10. Placemaking impacts are evidenced including people's pride of place and social bridging across neighbourhoods

Participants rated the programme 4.76/ 5 for **"It is important that it is happening here"** and 4.76/ 5 for **"It provides an important addition to the cultural life of the area"**.

Much of the feedback around the Crawley Murals highlights their positive effect on social bridging e.g. **"The tunnels look more inviting than before. Hopefully this will encourage people to come here rather than avoid it."**

After taking part in a Creative Playground event, participants gave an average score of 4.12 to the statement **"I am proud to be from Crawley"** - an increase from the 3.68 score they gave before the event.

11. People report inclusive opportunities to engage in arts and culture that improve their wellbeing

Survey data indicates that taking part in Creative Playground improves participants' wellbeing:

- **"I think differently"** - average score 3.84/ 5.
- **"I feel differently"** - average score 3.98/ 5.

Business plan targets

12. Crawley's reputation grows as a location for culture

Many established, high quality artists have collaborated with Creative Playground this year, including Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Victoria Melody and Vicki Dela Amedume. Requests from artists to collaborate increased from 94 in 24-25 to 150 this year.

The percentage of audience from outside Crawley reduced this year to 7% compared to 27% in 24-25. In 24-25, large scale events such as Around The Lake attracted people from a wider geographic area. This year's focus on smaller-scale Foundations events, listening and learning has resulted in this shift.



Posh Club, Billie Gold. Credit: Ian Greenland

The programme in 25-26

Creative Playground has three strands of programming that operate on different scales and have different objectives:

- **Beacon** - big commissions and events that connect with existing Crawley moments, national events and/or that reach 500 - 10000+ audiences and participants.
- **Foundation** - participatory activities that involve listening to and learning from each other through creative acts. They include creative activity that supports local people to make decisions on the direction of the future programme. Creative Playground also supports small commissions for local people to try something new.
- **Bridge** - a participatory programme that brings people together in new and different ways. Creative Playground encourages collaboration across generations, faiths, cultures, backgrounds and neighbourhoods to deepen mutual understanding. Through this strand it invests in the existing and latent talent, and the creative potential of Crawley's citizens of all ages through formal and informal training, skills sharing, skills development and mentoring.

The programme in 25-26

Headline figures

In total Creative Playground produced or supported **105** events, attended by **7,498** people.

Numbers by strand

Strand	No. of events	Audiences and participants
Beacon	25	3,264
Foundation	74	3,904
Bridge	6	330

25-26 saw an increase in the number of Foundation events to 74, compared to 33 in the previous year. Foundation audience and participant numbers increased to 3,904 from 2,514. This reflects the planning cycle and a specific strategic decision that this year should refocus on Foundation, building towards a town-wide festival in 2027-28. To accommodate this, the number of Beacon and Bridge events was reduced. These figures exclude the Crawley Murals, which are covered in a separate section of this report.

Events by quarter

Quarter	No. of events	Audiences and participants
Q1 April - June 25	16	748
Q2 July - Sept 25	15	2,441
Q3 Oct - Dec 25	33	2,802
Q4 Jan - Mar 26	41	1,507
Total	105	7,498

The programme in 25-26

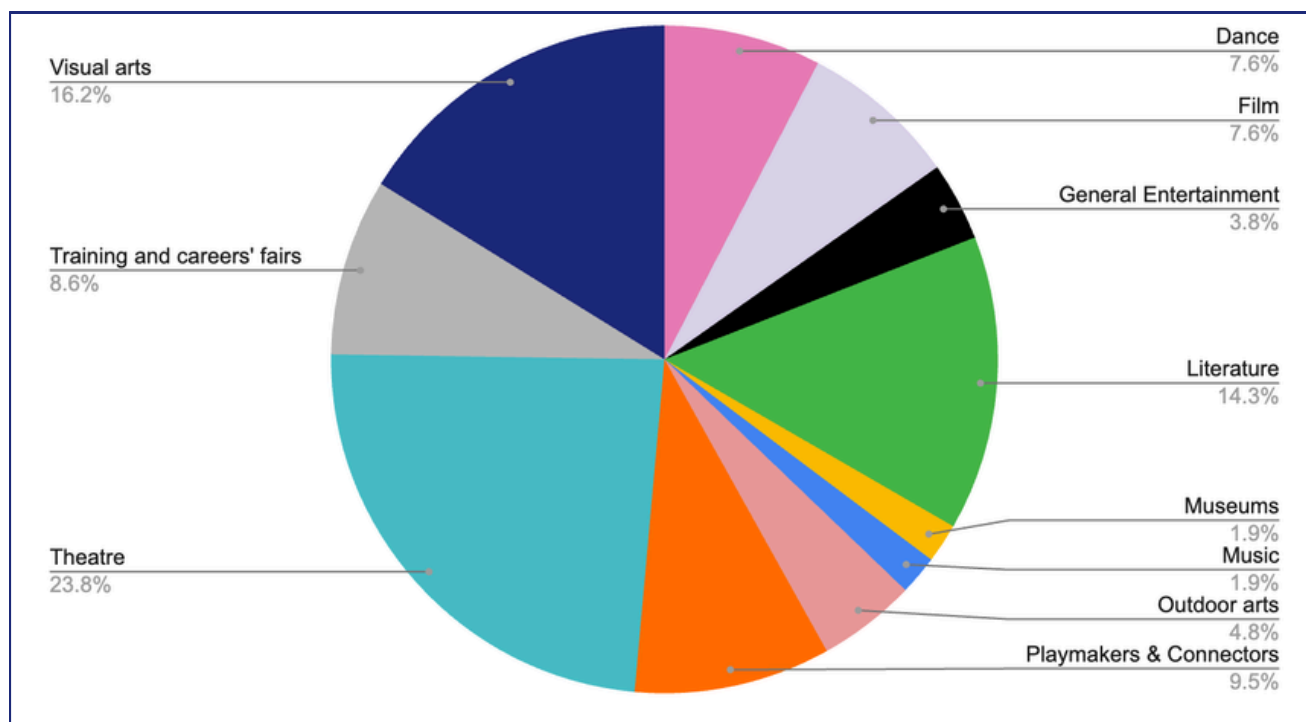
Age focus

Some of Creative Playground's activities are targeted at specific priority age groups:

Age group	No. of events	Audiences and participants (for these age-specific events)
0-16 years old	9	3,171
16-25 years old	2	69
Adults 18+	11	131
60+ years old	7	282

Note that this data shouldn't be seen as reflecting the number of audiences and participants from each age group across the programme as a whole. 70% of the programme was targeted at mixed aged groups and a variety of ages are reflected in survey data (see below).

Events by artform



Our public programme in 25-26 encompassed seven broad art forms, plus 'General Entertainment' (e.g. musical bingo, parties), training, visits to careers fairs and events with Playmakers and Community Connectors. Theatre, literature and visual arts are cornerstones of a well-balanced programme. Dance and music make up fewer events, but these were well attended e.g. the Playground tour of dance in schools, and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.



The Relaxed Concert by RPO at the Charis Centre, Crawley. Credit: Clive Martin

The Beacon strand

"Breaking down the barriers between orchestra and audience meant that we could respond, move around, and enjoy the experience in our own way. Following the initial concert we were treated to smaller scale activities where everyone could meet the musicians. This was a wonderful afternoon of interactive, accessible, and above all fun music-making." Attendee, The Relaxed Concert by RPO

Key Beacons events in 25-26 included:

- **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra** - Relaxed concert in a community setting at the Charis Centre, tailored especially for families and neurodiverse people. *1 event for 156 people.*
- **The Playground Tour** - Contemporary dance touring to five Crawley Primary Schools, featuring shows by professional dance companies Gandini Juggling and SAY . *5 events for 2,179 young people.*
- **Trouble, Struggle, Bubble and Squeak** - Vic Melody's comedy show transferred to Freeshop Bewbush, following a Come With Us trip to see it in Brighton, and Vic's residency at Freeshop working with local residents. *1 event for 55 people.*



Participants at Creative Crawley Open Day. Credit: Ian Greenland

The Foundation strand

“The day was filled with dancing, singing, VR activities, arts and crafts, and plenty of joy and creativity. Everyone who came along had the chance to explore new skills, express themselves, and have fun together.” Participant, Open Day

Key Foundations events in 25-26 included:

- **Come With Us** - Trips taking residents to experience cultural events outside Crawley, leading to discussion about the Creative Playground programme trips in 25-26, including to the Greenwich & Docklands International Festival, British Library and Vic Melody's show in Brighton. *6 events for 61 people.*
- **Open Days** - Multi-activity days with a variety of creative activities for residents to take part in. *2 events for 497 people.*
- **Film Project** - Co-creation with participants from the Dimensions learning disability charity, including workshops, filming and a screening. *2 events with 102 people.*



Playmaker Feast. Credit: Ian Greenland

The Bridge strand

“It was great having a group of professionals in your space, some who know each other and some who don’t. Great to connect and learn together.” Participant, Trauma Informed Training Workshop

Bridge activities in 25-26 included:

- **Boost** - The initiative of investment in local small scale, sustainable, creative ideas to encourage creative entrepreneurialism and independent thinking. This year there were two projects - Musical Bingo with Ciara Lyons, and Friendly Dragon at Crawley Museum. *3 events for 285 people.*
- **Drive** - The training programme for Playmakers, other local people and the Creative Playground team. It has included formal and informal training for the Welcome Team including first aid and a trauma-informed training workshop. *3 training sessions for 45 people.*



Audience in Unit 79/80 County Mall, Credit: Ian Greenland

Audiences in 25-26

"So many people joining in, young and old. A fantastic experience to be a part of" Come With Us Attendee, African Night Fever

This section predominantly refers to data from three sources:

- Creative Playground audience/ participant online survey (developed by Flying Geese).
- Abridged paper versions of the longer online survey.
- Impact & Insight survey.

Combined, these give us a large sample size of 464 responses to analyse. However, there are several limitations in the sample to consider when reviewing this data:

- Under 16s are not directly targeted when surveying and so this group is not reflected in the data.
- The nature of different events made gathering feedback easier at some and more difficult at others. Therefore, the sample includes a larger number of responses from The Posh Club (87), Doodling Is Good For Us (60) and Open Days (44).
- 75% of survey respondents were female, and further research is needed to establish whether $\frac{3}{4}$ of audiences and participants are indeed female, or if this simply reflects that males are less likely to complete surveys.

Audiences in 25-26

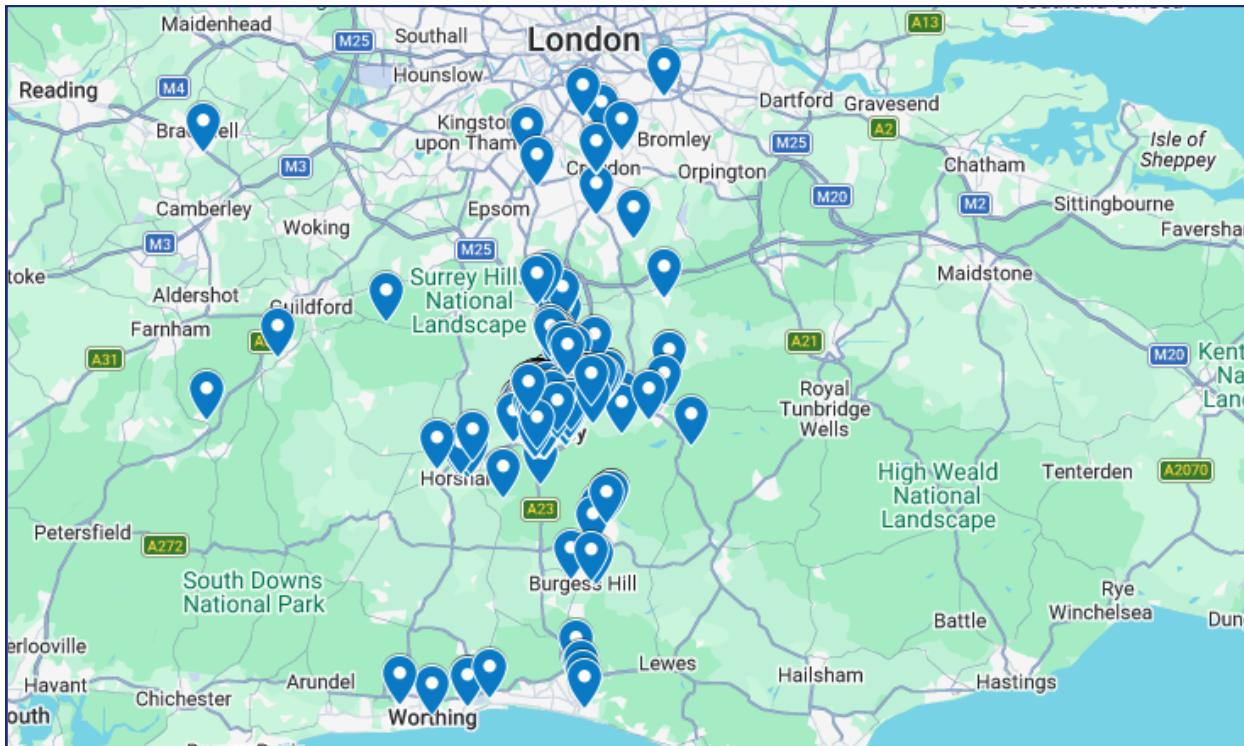
Where audiences live

This Google map shows where 25-26 Creative Playground audiences and participants live:

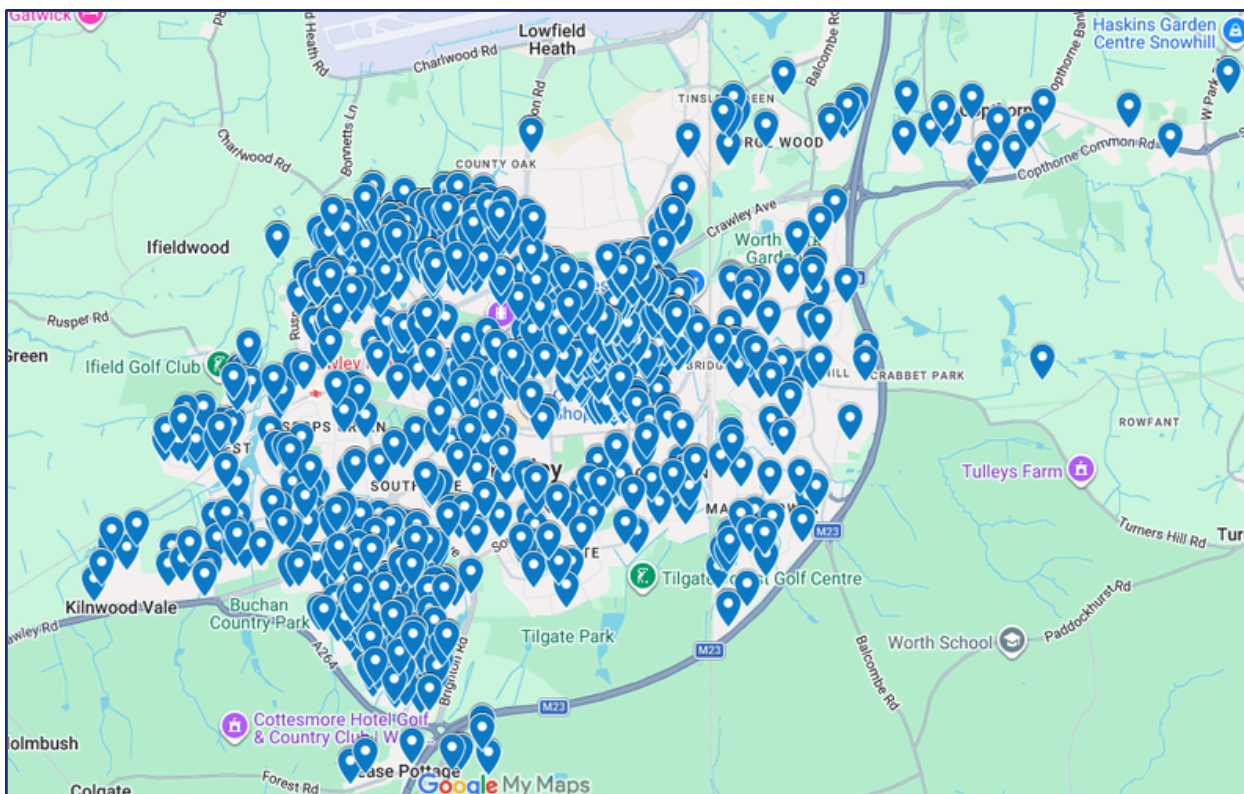
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1wlwLRgZkRq9hFUUn2JTfYvAfkRkYcDIA&usp=sharing>

Data was sourced from surveys, event booking data and data provided from schools hosting the Playground Tour.

Postcode map - Sussex and South East:



Postcode map - Crawley:



Audiences in 25-26

While everyone is welcome, Creative Playground broadly targets increased engagement from the West of Crawley (RH11), which experiences higher levels of deprivation:

Postcode group	% of respondents
RH10 (east of Crawley)	42%
RH11 (west of Crawley)	51%
Other RH postcodes	4%
Brighton (BN) postcodes	1%
London postcodes	1%
Elsewhere	1%

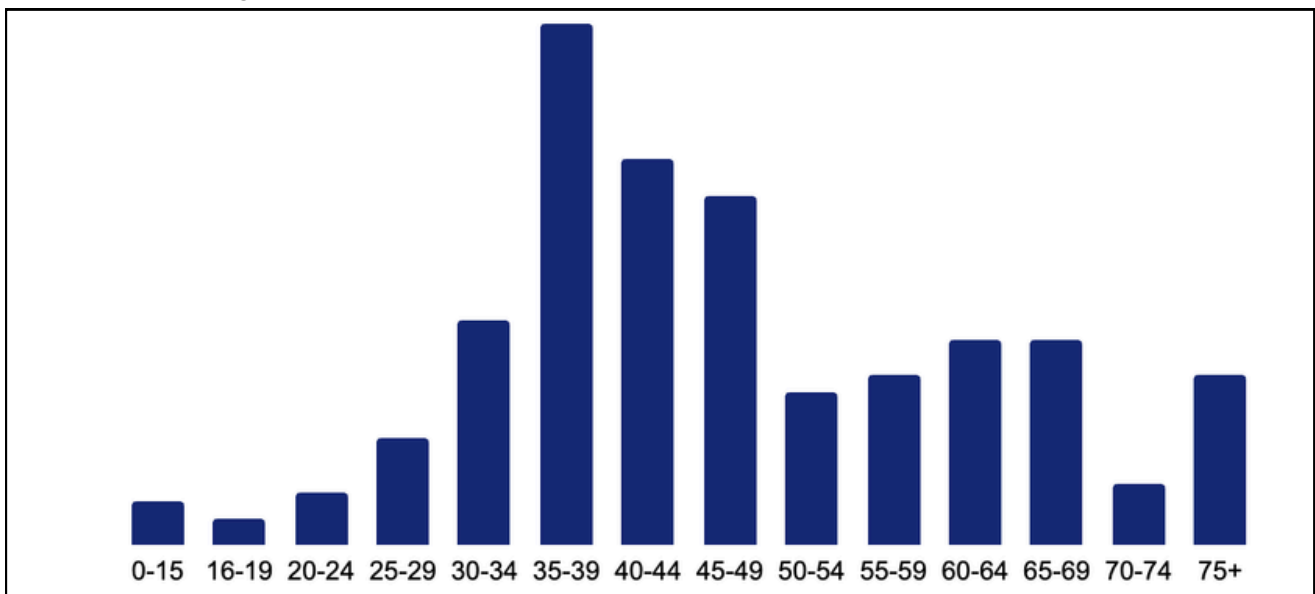
Reflecting this target, RH11 residents made up a majority of audiences and participants (51%), while there was still a healthy representation from RH10 (42%).

This year, a far smaller proportion of audiences came from outside Crawley (7%) compared to 24-25 (27%). In 24-25, large scale events such as Around The Lake attracted people from a wider geographic area. This year's focus on smaller-scale Foundations events, listening and learning has resulted in this shift.

The Playground Tour, which visits schools across Crawley, more specifically focused on the West of Crawley in 25-26, with 91% of Playground Tour audiences from RH11.

Age of survey respondents

The age of survey respondents skews towards the 35-49 age group (49%) of respondents. This is an increase in this age band compared to 24-25 (40%).





The Posh Club High Fashion Special. Credit: Ian Greenland

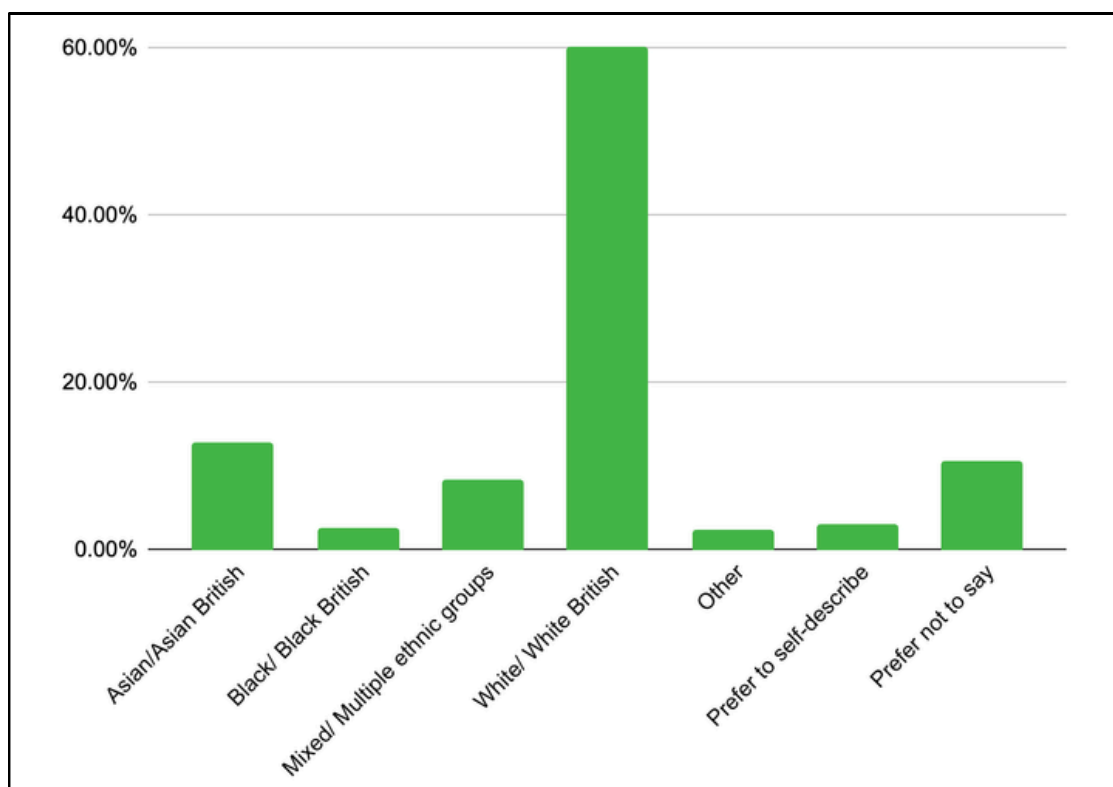
From Creative Playground's priority age groups:

- **Under 16** - 2% of respondents
- **16-25** - 3% of respondents
- **60+** - 25% of respondents

This year has seen a decrease in the percentage of survey responses from the 16-25 age group, but a strong increase in the over 60s age group.

Ethnicity

26.1% of respondents identified as being from a Global Majority ethnic group, while 60.2% were White/ White British. 26.6% of Crawley's population identifies as Global Majority (Census 2021) and therefore our audience does effectively represent the diversity in Crawley.



Audiences in 25-26

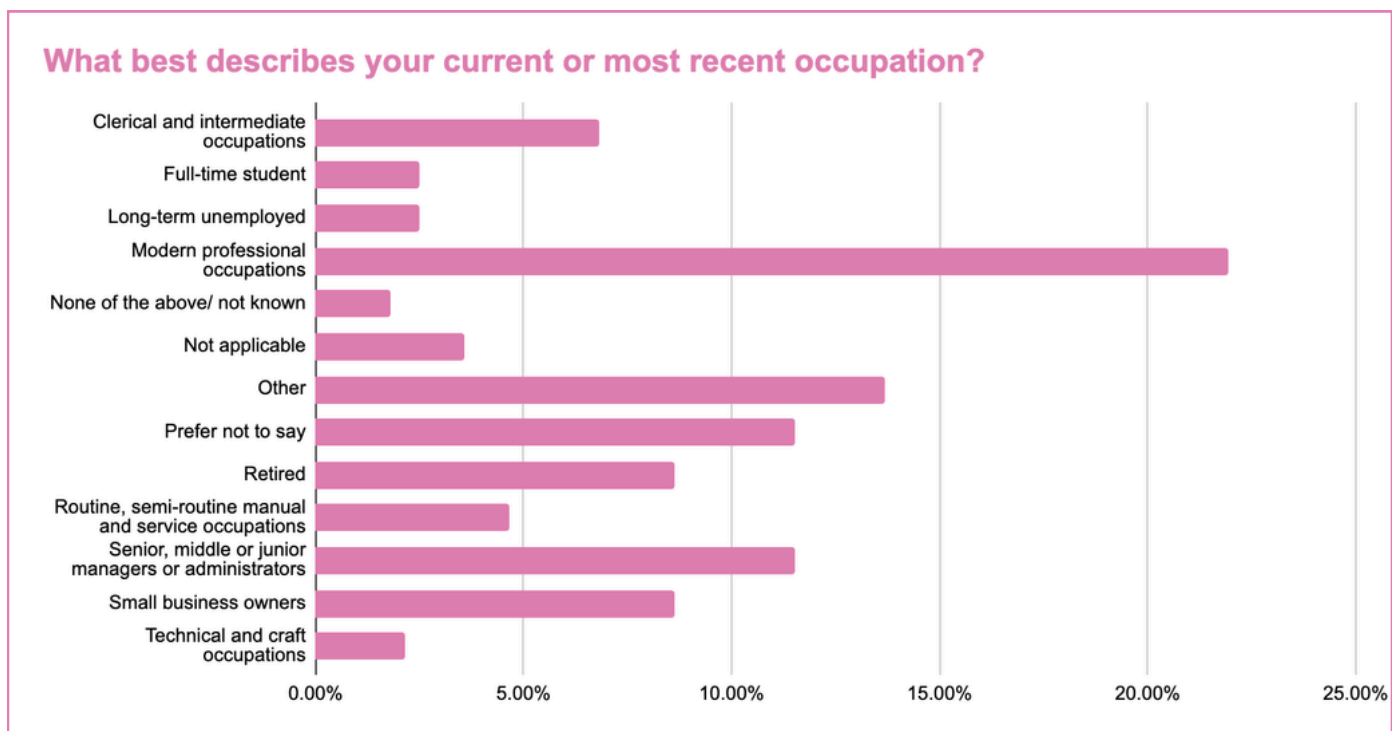
25-26 saw a decrease in the number of people responding 'prefer not to say' to 10.7% (24-25: 14.1%). This may reflect increasing trust in Creative Playground among audiences and participants, or staff and volunteers more reflective of the community conducting one-on-one surveys, rather than relying on more impersonal online methods.

Disability and neurodiversity

11% of respondents identified as disabled (24-25: 11%) and 23% as neurodiverse (24-25: 22%), while 7% identified as both (24-25: 6%) . This suggests the percentage of the audience that is disabled and/ or neurodiverse has remained static or increased slightly over the past twelve months.

Again, the percentage of 'prefer not to say' responses dropped to 10% (24-25: 16%) for both these questions.

Occupation



The largest occupation group in the sample is **Modern Professional Occupations** (21.9.2%) - a decrease from 27.2% in 24-25.

This year there have been small increases across a diverse range of occupation types, including small business owners, routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations, and clerical and intermediate occupations. This suggests the programme is increasingly attracting people from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

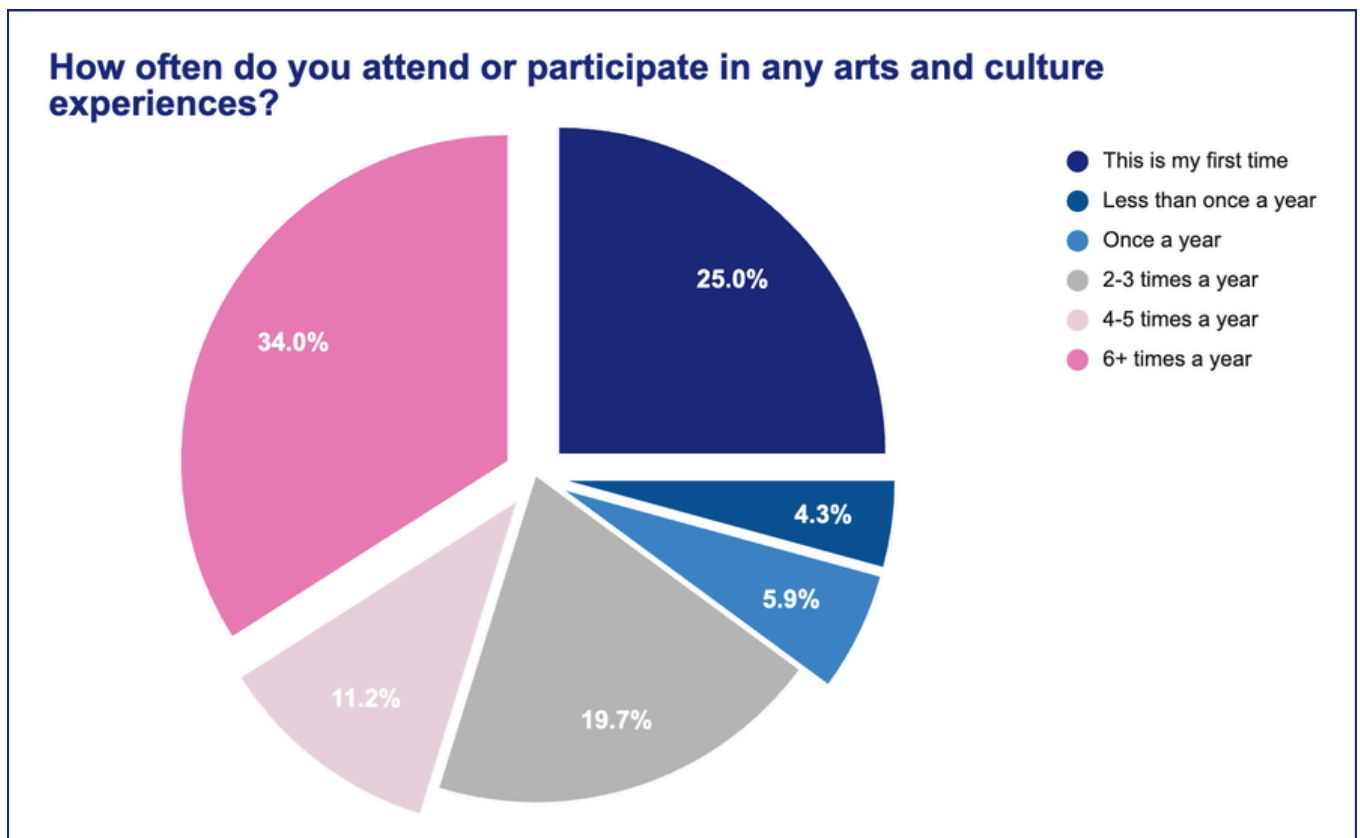
Audiences in 25-26

“Thank you for looking after us so well. I wouldn’t have been able to come without it. This was a big deal for me. I don’t normally do things like this” Participant, Come With Us trip to see Victoria Melody’s show at Brighton Dome.

Frequency of arts attendance

The audience has been characterised by two patterns of arts and cultural engagement:

- **Infrequent engagers** (once a year or less) - 35.2%. For 25%, their Creative Playground experience in 25-26 was their first ever arts and cultural experience, reflecting the CPP mission of engaging the least engaged in arts and culture.
- **Frequent engagers** (4x a year or more) - 45.2%. 34% engage very frequently - 6x a year or more.



This year, a lower proportion of survey respondents are in the Infrequent Engagers groups (35.2% vs 41.8% in 24-25). This does not necessarily mean Creative Playground is reaching fewer Infrequent Engagers. It may be that previously infrequent engagers who return to Creative Playground events have now moved up to the middle '2 to 3 times a year' category, which represents 19.7% of respondents.



Young participant at Creative Crawley Open Day. Credit: Ian Greenland

Audience perspectives in 25-26

The data for this section comes from a combination of surveys and ACE's mandatory Impact & Insight assessments.

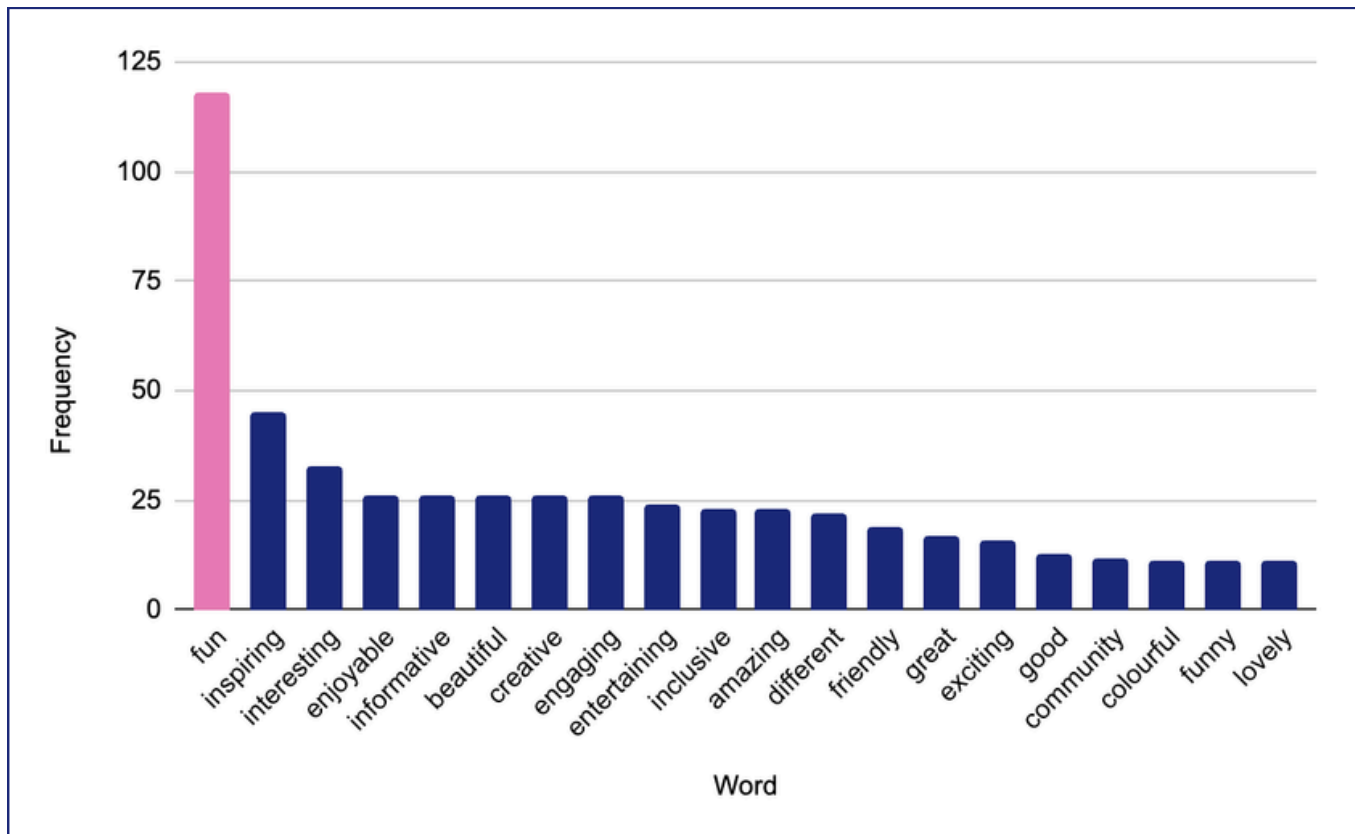
Participants were asked to describe their experiences in three words. This simple word cloud shows that - as with last year - the predominant response people had to their Creative Playground experience is that it was **fun**:

"We absolutely loved it. Totally inclusive, interactive, creative, thoughtful and FUN!"
Audience member, The Relaxed concert by RPO



Audience perspectives in 25-26

Words by frequency



Responses can be grouped into five key categories:

- **Fun and enjoyable** - demonstrating that people had a good time.
- **Inspiring, amazing, beautiful** - 'awe' words showing that people had a strong emotional reaction (linked to 'I feel different' in the theory of change).
- **Interesting, informative** - showing people learnt or found activities educational.
- **Engaging, creative** - people felt connected to the work and were able to express their creativity.
- **Friendly, community** - people felt welcomed and safe.

See, think, feel and do

In the following sections, respondents were asked to react to statements on a scale of 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

These statements were, 'Because of what I saw or took part in':

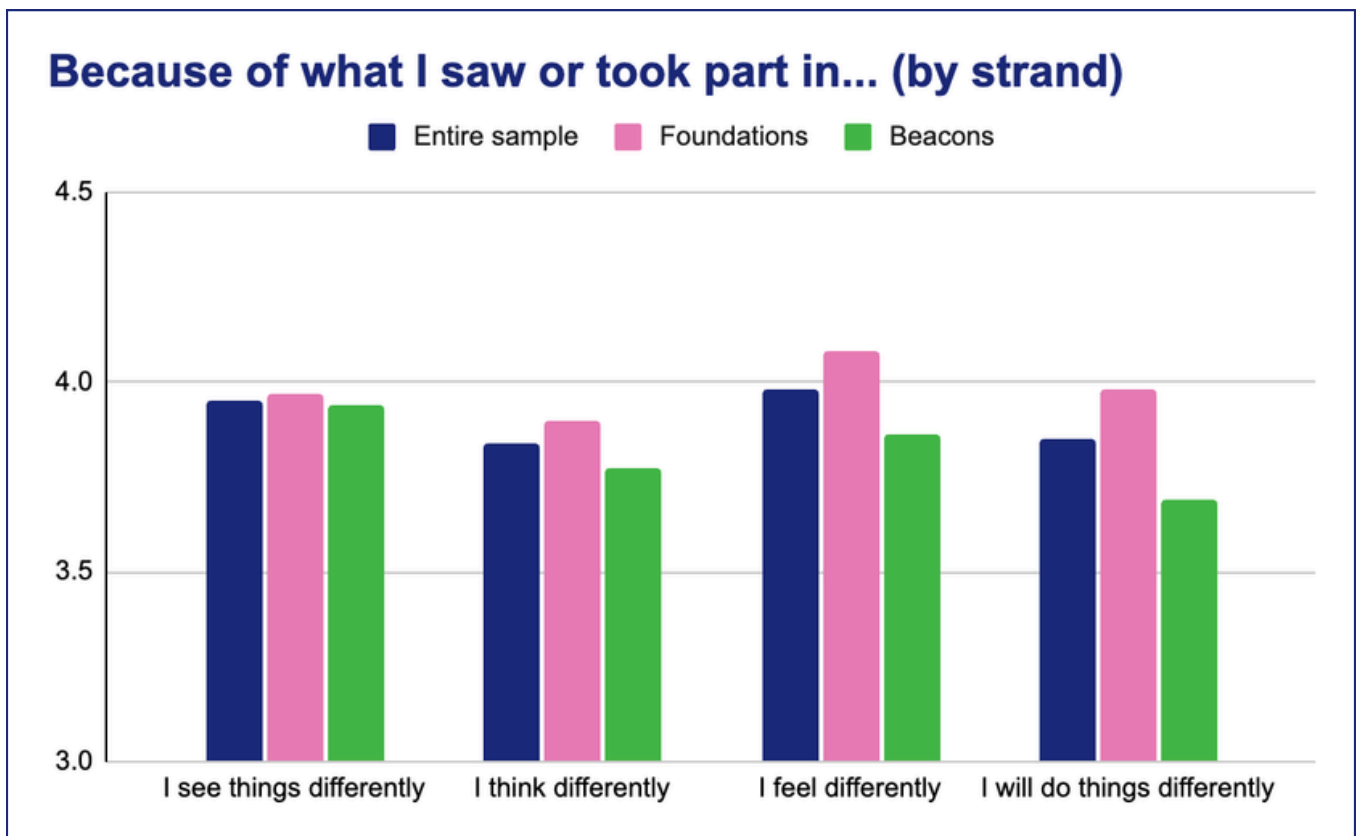
- I see things differently
- I think differently
- I feel differently
- I will do things differently

Audience perspectives in 25-26

These statements relate back to the outcomes in the Theory of Change, co-curated with Crawley residents at the beginning of the programme.

For each question, the average response across all respondents and groups never dropped below 3 (neither agree nor disagree), and in the majority of cases was between 4 and 5. Therefore, in the graphs below the scale has been changed and 'zoomed in' between 3 and 4.5 on the vertical axis to demonstrate the nuance in some of the responses.

"This was a wonderfully choreographed production. Amazingly vibrant and entertaining. Full of music and vibes. Lots for me to think about and appreciate."
Attendee, Closer to my Dreams by Chad Taylor



The overall scores this year were slightly lower than in 24-25 across three of the dimensions:

	25-26	24-25
I see things differently	3.95	4.03
I think differently	3.84	3.85
I feel differently	3.98	4.07
I will do things differently	3.85	3.77

Audience perspectives in 25-26

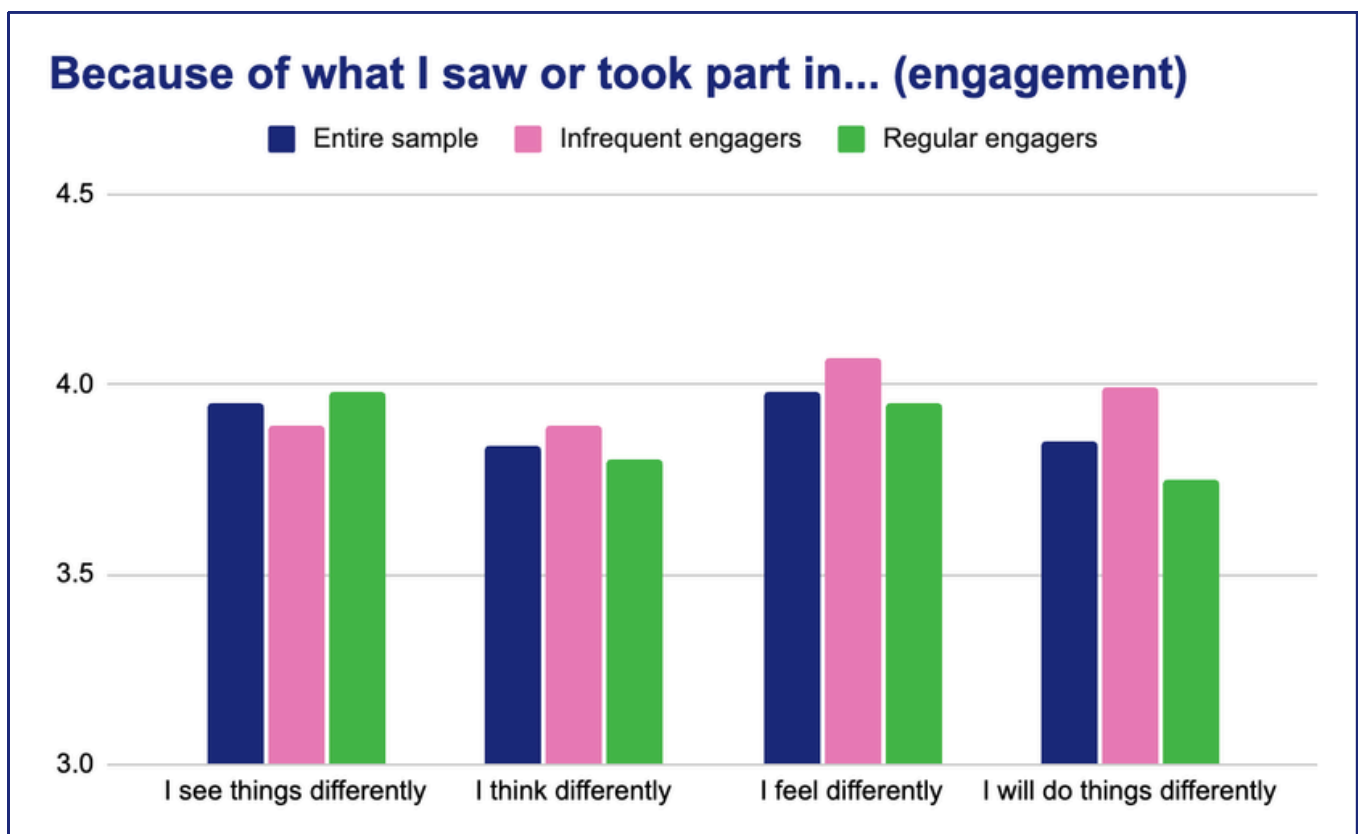
These variations are small so do not necessarily reflect a trend. Data below explores how the Solstice* event scored lower on these metrics and has brought the average down.

**Solstice is a 10-minute laser light and music show created by artist Seb Lee-Delisle which was commissioned by Crawley Borough Council, and presented in Creative Crawley's pop up theatre space in Unit 79/80 County Mall.*

However, last year Creative Playground identified **'I will do things differently'** as an area to target for improvement, and it is heartening to see this score increase in 25-26.

Foundations events have a greater impact, compared to Beacons, across all dimensions. The effect is most pronounced for **'I will do things differently'**, suggesting the more participatory Foundations events lead to greater behavioural change and embedding creativity in daily life.

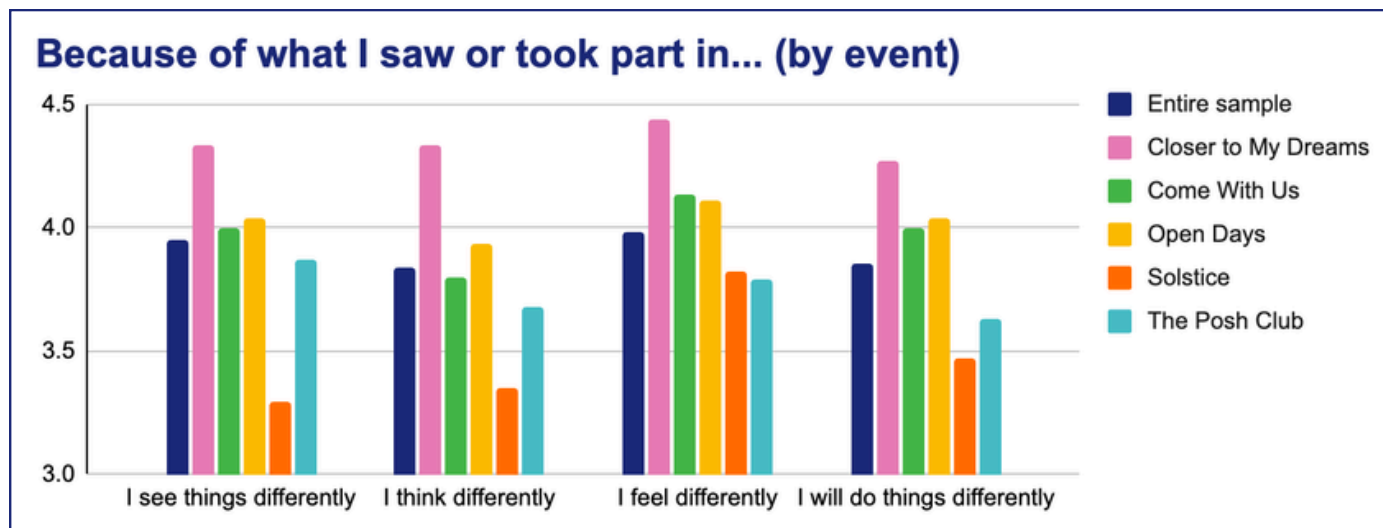
This **'I will do things differently'** effect has also been more pronounced on those people who engage with the arts less frequently:



Audience perspectives in 25-26

Impact by event

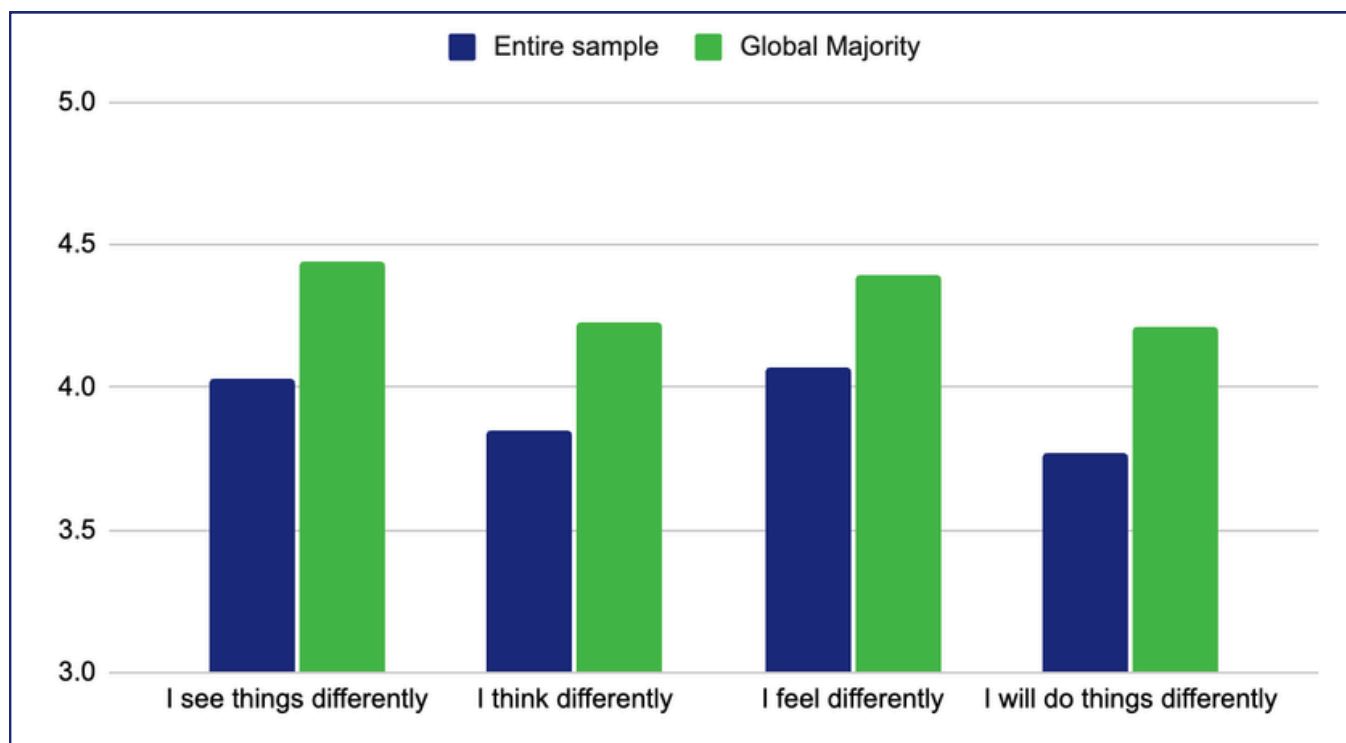
The following chart shows the difference in impact of event/ series where there are more than 15 survey responses to these questions:



It shows that Closer To My Dreams had a very strong impact across all four dimensions, while Solstice had less of an impact on 'I see things differently', 'I think differently' and 'I will do things differently'.

Global majority participants

The impact on global majority participants was more pronounced across all four dimensions:



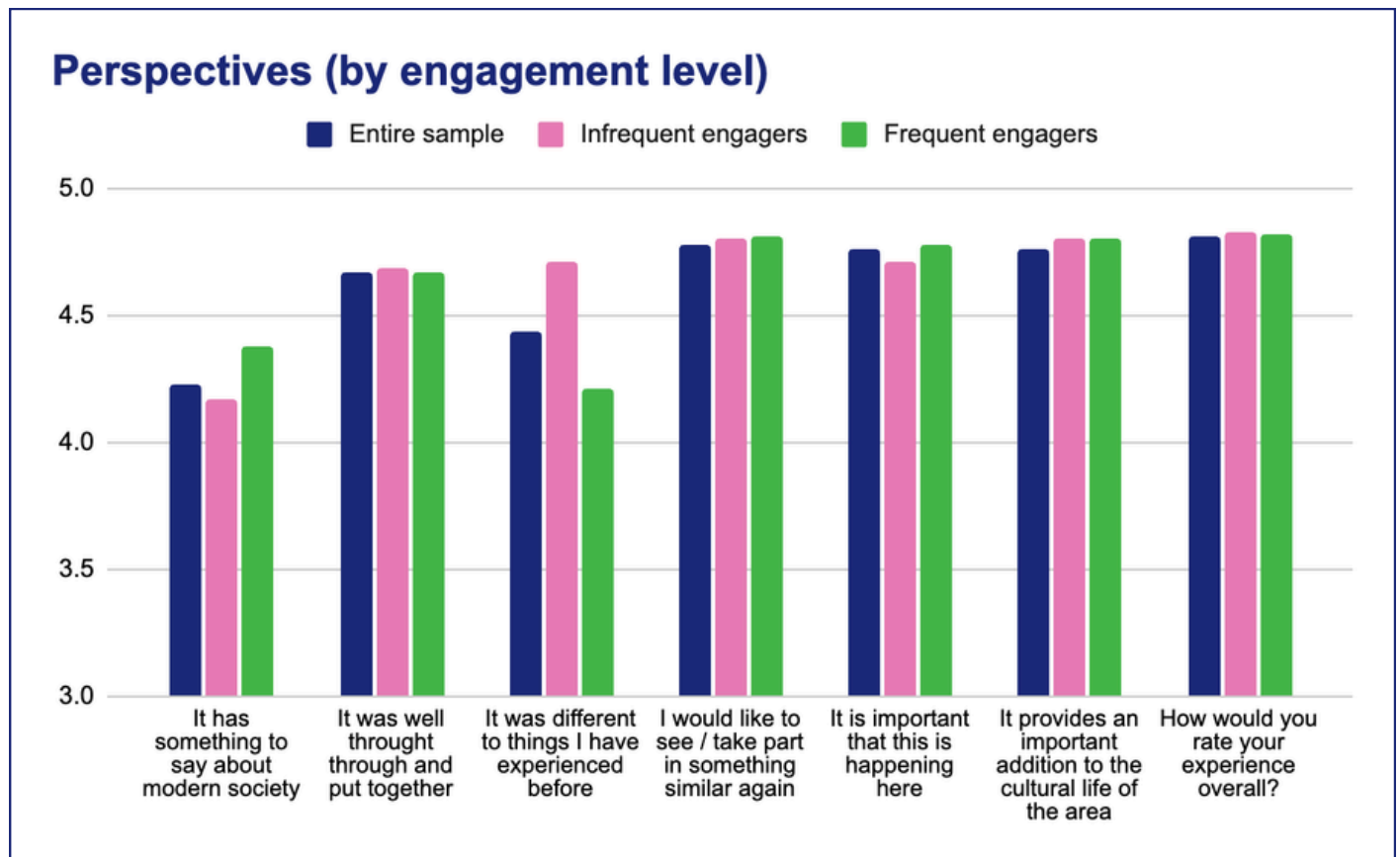
Audience perspectives in 25-26

Perspectives

A further set of questions encouraged respondents to offer critical perspectives on what they had experienced. Overall, respondents rated their experiences very highly at an average of 4.81 out of 5 (24-25: 4.79).

Due to variations in the surveys presented at different events (e.g. paper versions), only four responses to these questions were gathered from Beacons event attendees.

Therefore, responses are effectively limited to the Foundations strand. Better planning regarding surveys and programme strands is needed in future years to redress this balance.



The average for each indicator was above 4. While the average response to **'It has something to say about modern society'** was lower than the other metrics, its 25-26 average rating (4.23) is an increase from 24-25 (4.14).

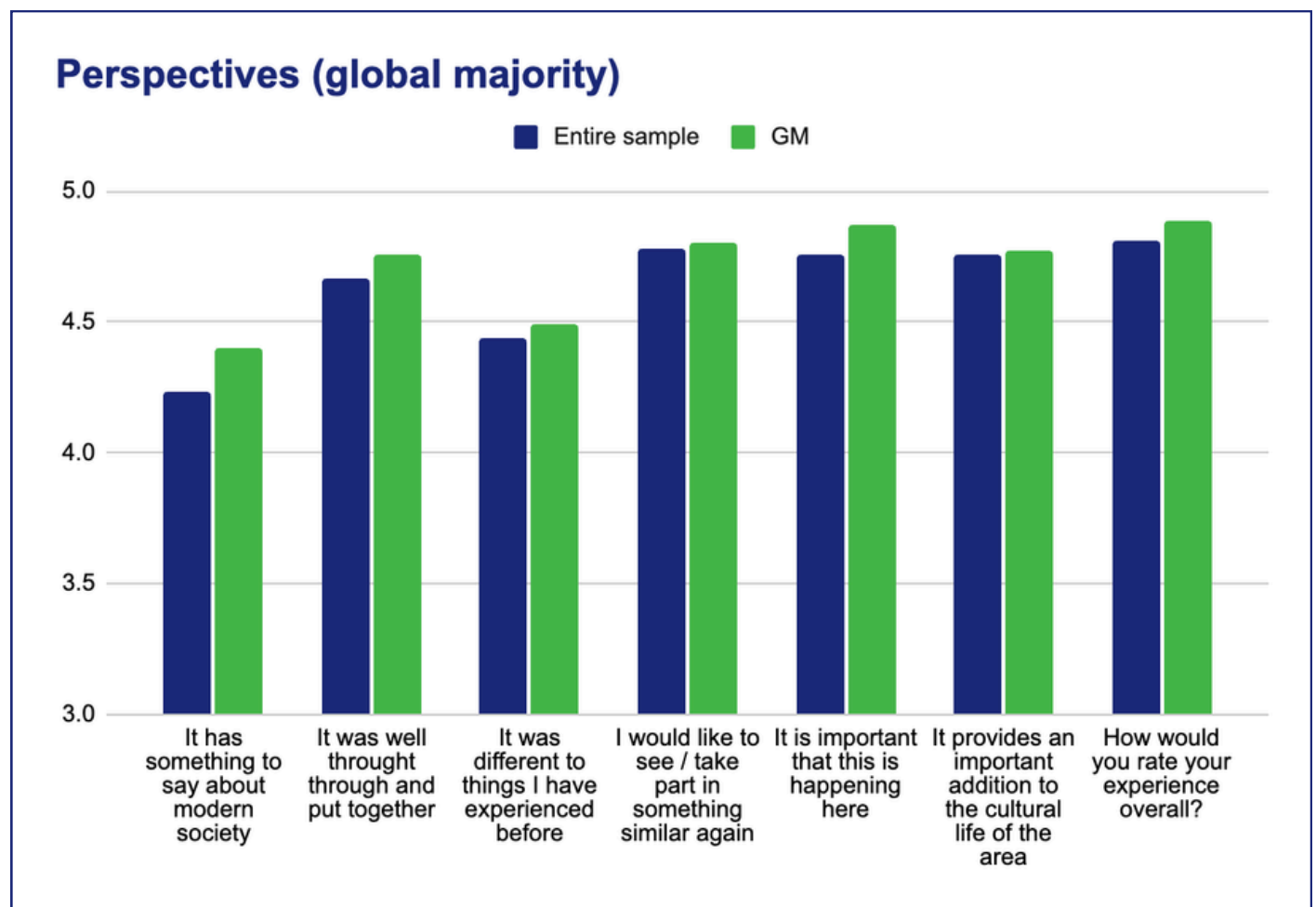
In 24-25, Infrequent Engagers gave lower scores for **'It is important that it is happening here'** and **'It provides an important addition to the cultural life of the area'**, compared to frequent engagers. This year the scores are almost identical. This suggests that infrequent attenders are starting to value arts and culture more highly as part of the fabric and life of the town.

Audience perspectives in 25-26

“Being Black, it was good to see and know that they acknowledge what they’ve done, watch the British and mentions of slavery and history. It was enlightening” Irma, Participant, Come With Us Trip to V&A Storehouse

Global majority participants

Again, Global Majority participants gave higher ratings for each dimension:

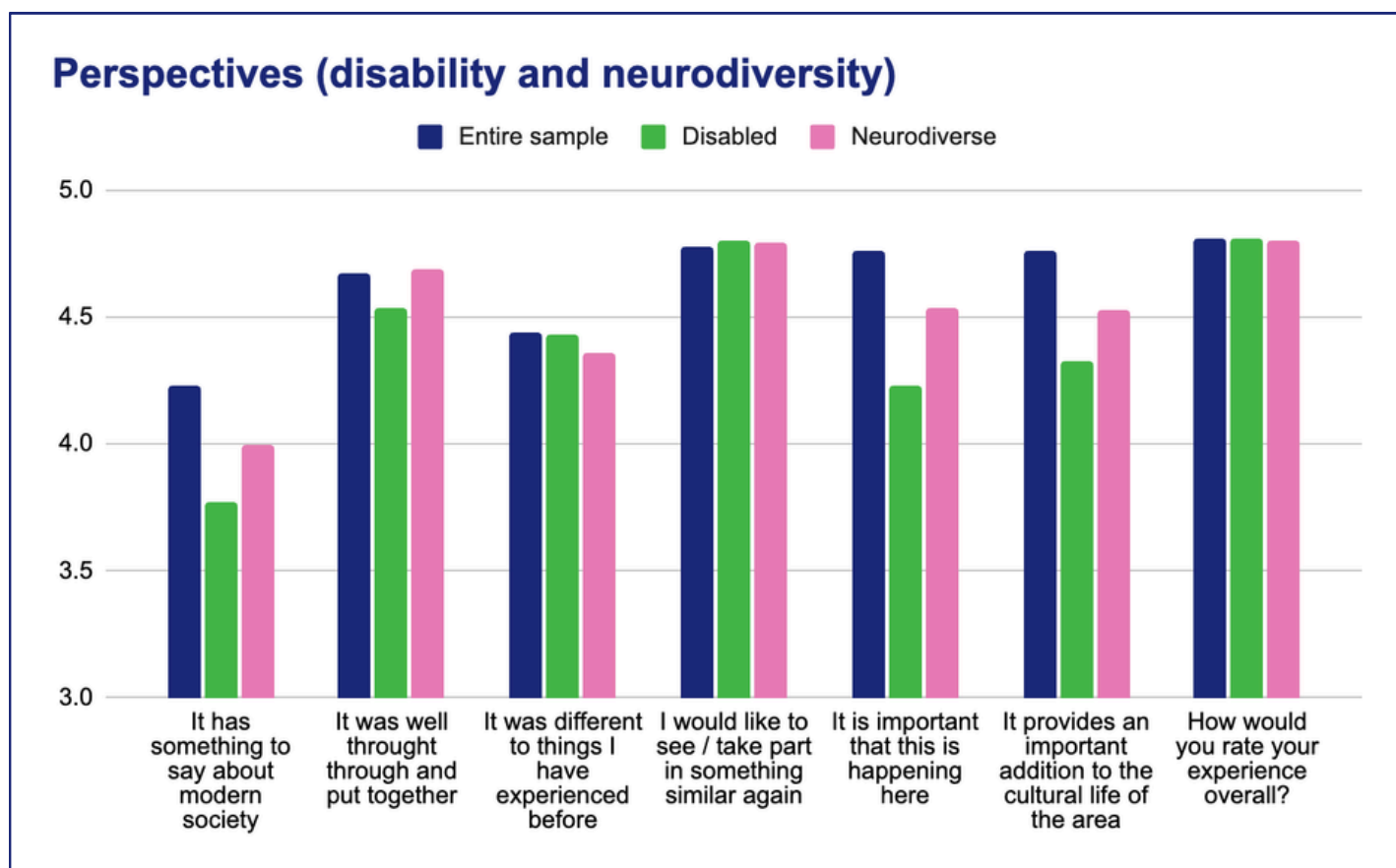


The difference was most pronounced for **'It had something to say about modern society'** (4.4 vs 4.23 for the entire sample).

Audience perspectives in 25-26

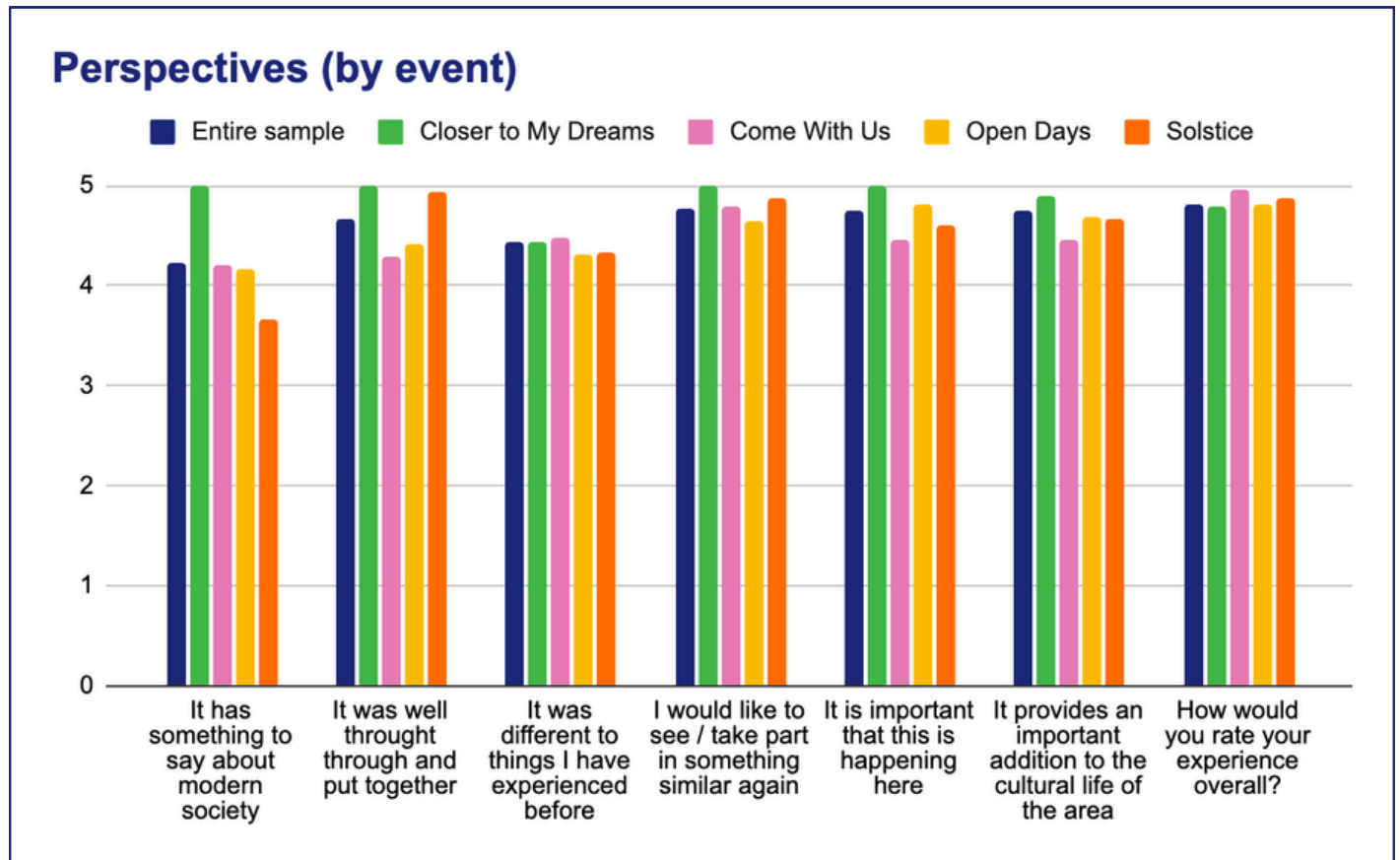
Disabled and neurodiverse participants

Both disabled and neurodiverse participants rated their overall experience as highly as the entire sample, and were just as likely to say they wanted to see/ take part in something similar again. However, disabled participants in particular gave lower rankings for **'It has something to say about modern society'** (3.77 vs entire sample 4.23) and **'It is important that it is happening here'** (4.23 vs entire sample 4.76). It would be useful to further explore the reasons for this, and potentially consider activities and events that specifically engage with issues facing disabled people in Crawley.



Audience perspectives in 25-26

Perspectives by event



Ratings were generally consistent across events. These variations are worth nothing:

- **Closer To My Dreams** - ranked highest across all but two dimensions, with all respondents giving it a score of 5 for **'It has something to say about modern society'**, **'It was well thought through and put together'**, **'It is important that it is happening here'** and **'I would like to see/ take part in something similar again'**. This reflects the high scores for the See, Think, Feel, Do questions.
- **Solstice** - while Solstice scored lower across See, Think, Feel, Do dimensions, it scores highly on these questions, particularly for **'It was well thought through and put together'** (4.93), **'I would like to see/ take part in something similar again'** (4.87) and **Overall experience** (4.87). In this case, attendees enjoyed the event and had a good time - but it did not impact the personal outcomes set out in the Theory of Change. The team reflects that it is fine for some events to have a wow factor and provide simple enjoyment, rather than drive long-term change for individuals.



Crawley Oak, Eloise Gillow. Credit: Ian Greenland

Our impact on placemaking in Crawley

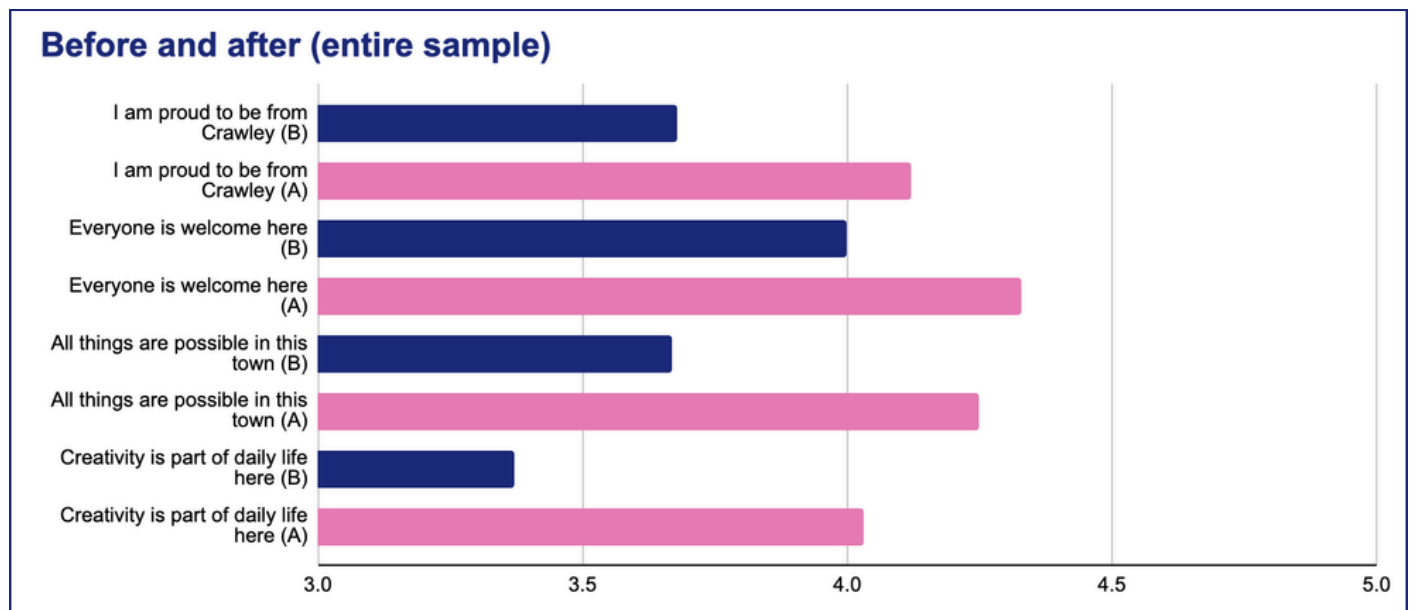
We sought perspectives from participants on four 'placemaking' questions:

- **I am proud to be from Crawley**
- **Everyone is welcome here**
- **All things are possible in this town**
- **Creativity is part of everyday life here**

Respondents were asked to reflect on how they felt before and after so Creative Playground could also explore the level of change in views.

I have extreme social anxiety and when Vic introduced herself at the shop I just froze. I couldn't properly speak to her but now I have seen the show and I have met you guys. I think I will be ok to have a conversation. I want to tell her what I thought." Cary-Anne, Participant in Come With Us with artist in residence Victoria Melody, 2025

Audience perspectives in 25-26



Taking part in a Creative Playground event had a positive impact on all four metrics.

However, this year all 'Before' scores were lower than in 24-25. For example:

- **'I am proud to be from Crawley'**: 3.9 (24-25); 3.68 (25-26).

The change was particularly notable among Infrequent arts engagers, whose 'Pride' score dropped from 4.26 (24-25) to 3.37 (25-26).

The lower score this year may reflect the different sample (e.g. more people from less affluent west of Crawley), or something more profound that has changed perspectives in Crawley e.g. economic difficulties or influence of far-right politics.

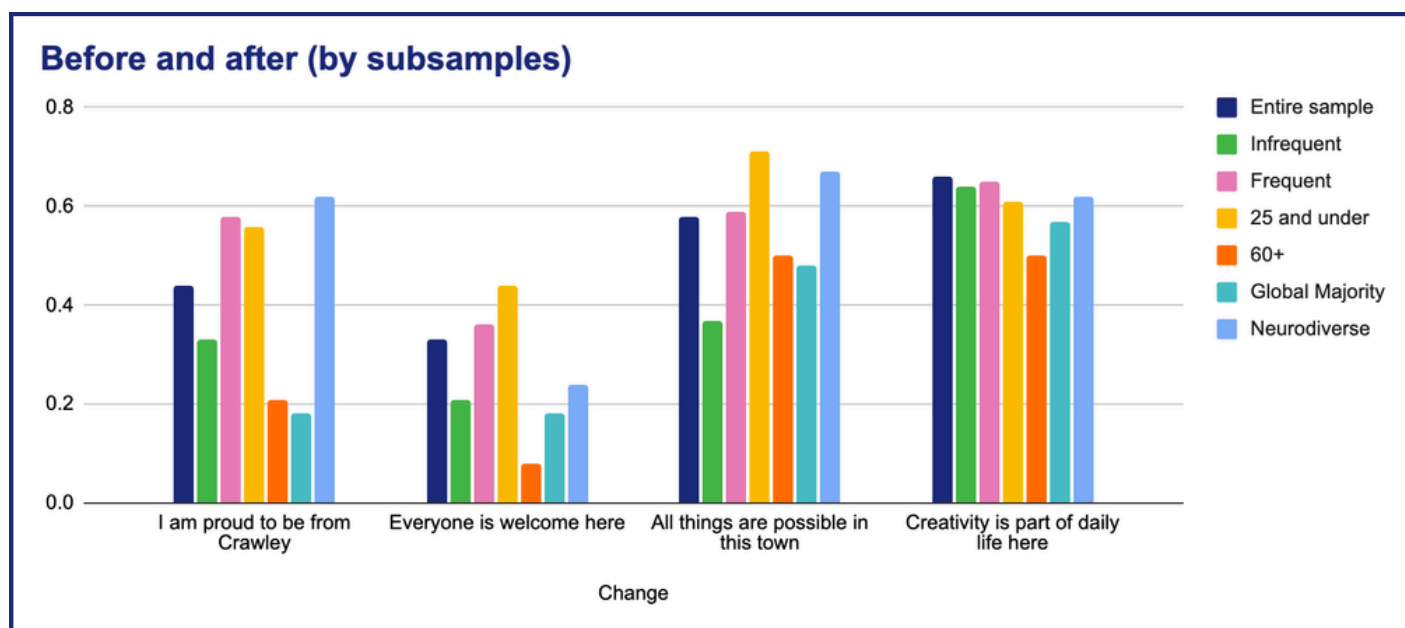
This shows the challenges of measuring the broad, longitudinal impact of a cultural programme such as Creative Playground against a changing background of macro-economic and societal changes.

"The opportunities Creative Crawley provides have opened magical doors - proving that easy, meaningful access to the arts can dissolve barriers. Their work so beautifully reflects our school's values of courage, curiosity, and compassion, and aligns with one of our core educational drivers: the arts. We are incredibly grateful for the inspiration and inclusion Creative Crawley brings to our town and our school." Carol Collins, Seymour Primary School

Audience perspectives in 25-26

Looking at before and after data, the greatest impact was on **'Creativity is a part of daily life here'** (before: 3.37; after 4.03), meaning that the majority view changed from 'neither agree nor disagree' to 'agree' following engagement with the programme. This mirrors a similar finding in 24-25.

The following chart shows the change in perspectives on the four placemaking metrics across a variety of groups in the sample:



The Creative Playground programme had a strong impact (0.5+ change) for:

- **'Creativity is part of everyday life here'** - all groups.
- **'I am proud to be from Crawley'** - Frequent arts engagers, age 25 and under, neurodiverse.
- **'All things are possible in this town'** - Frequent arts engagers, age 25 and under, 60+, neurodiverse.

The highest change was among people aged 25 and under, and their view on 'All things are possible in this town', which increased by 0.71. However, this was a small sample of 11 residents.

In some cases, changes are less profound because 'Before' scores were higher. This is particularly the case for global majority residents compared to the entire sample.

<u>I am proud to be from Crawley.</u>	Before	After
Global majority	4.41	4.59
Entire sample	3.68	4.12



"Still from "Against All Odds" film Credit: Amara Bjorkhaug

Case study: Against All Odds

"We are really pleased with how the guys are having such a great time, we can't thank you enough." Support Worker, Dimensions Outreach 3 Way.

Back in March 2025, Graham from Dimensions Outreach 3 Way (a charity supporting local learning disabled adults) asked a simple question: "Can we make a film?"

A year later, sitting in Creative Crawley's theatre space with 40 people, watching their faces light up as the film played, the answer felt pretty clear - yes, we can.

This project has been a real reminder of what it takes to make something meaningful together. It wasn't just about the final film — it was about making sure the whole process felt thoughtful, enjoyable, and genuinely shaped by the people involved. Taking the time to do that well has strengthened how we approach projects, from maintaining quality to building stronger relationships with local communities.

Working closely with Dimensions Outreach 3 Way from the start was key. Together, we interviewed filmmakers and landed on an excellent filmmaker and facilitator, Amara Bjorkhaug. Her approach, attitude and skill were instrumental to shaping the workshops, making sure the project was truly co-created.

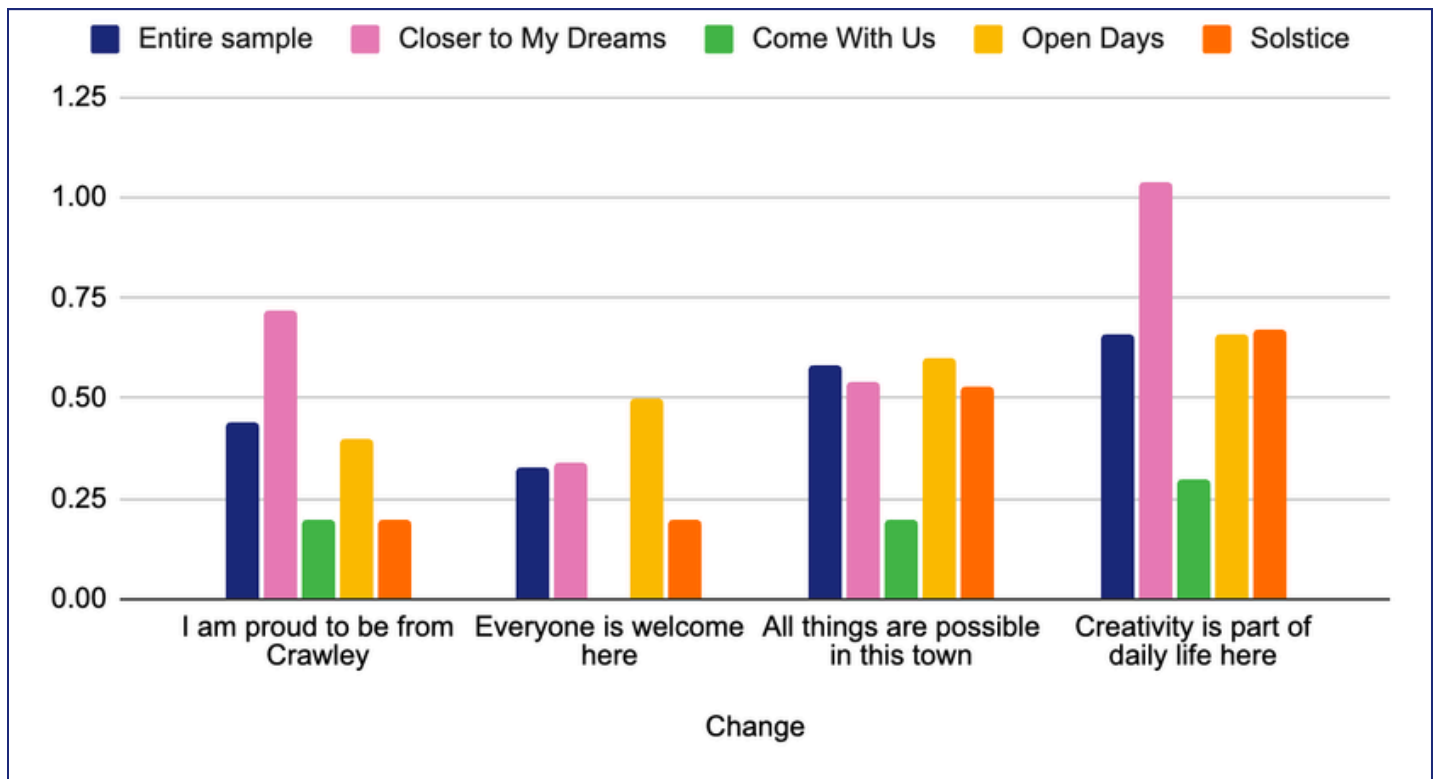
The workshops themselves were designed to feel welcoming and fun, creating space for Amara to explore the participants' ideas and decide what they wanted the film to be. From there, those ideas were carefully developed into real parts of the final film — something everyone could recognise and feel proud of. "

Becky Jones, Community Producer

Audience perspectives in 25-26

Placemaking dimensions by event

Again, Closer To My Dreams stands out for its impact, especially related to **'I am proud to be from Crawley'** and **'Creativity is part of everyday life here'**.



What impact & insight surveys tell us

As well as collecting data for its Illuminate platform, ACE mandates that at least four evaluations per year are undertaken using its Impact & Insight platform. This allows respondents to rate statements about an event or activity using dimensions related to themes including rigour, relevance and local impact (Flying Geese has been able to merge some of this data into the wider dataset analysed above).

Impact & Insight is distinctive from other methods because it encourages staff to reflect on activities before and after they take place, including how they expect audiences to respond. It also allows comparisons to be made between how the staff team perceive an event or activity and how participants perceive it.

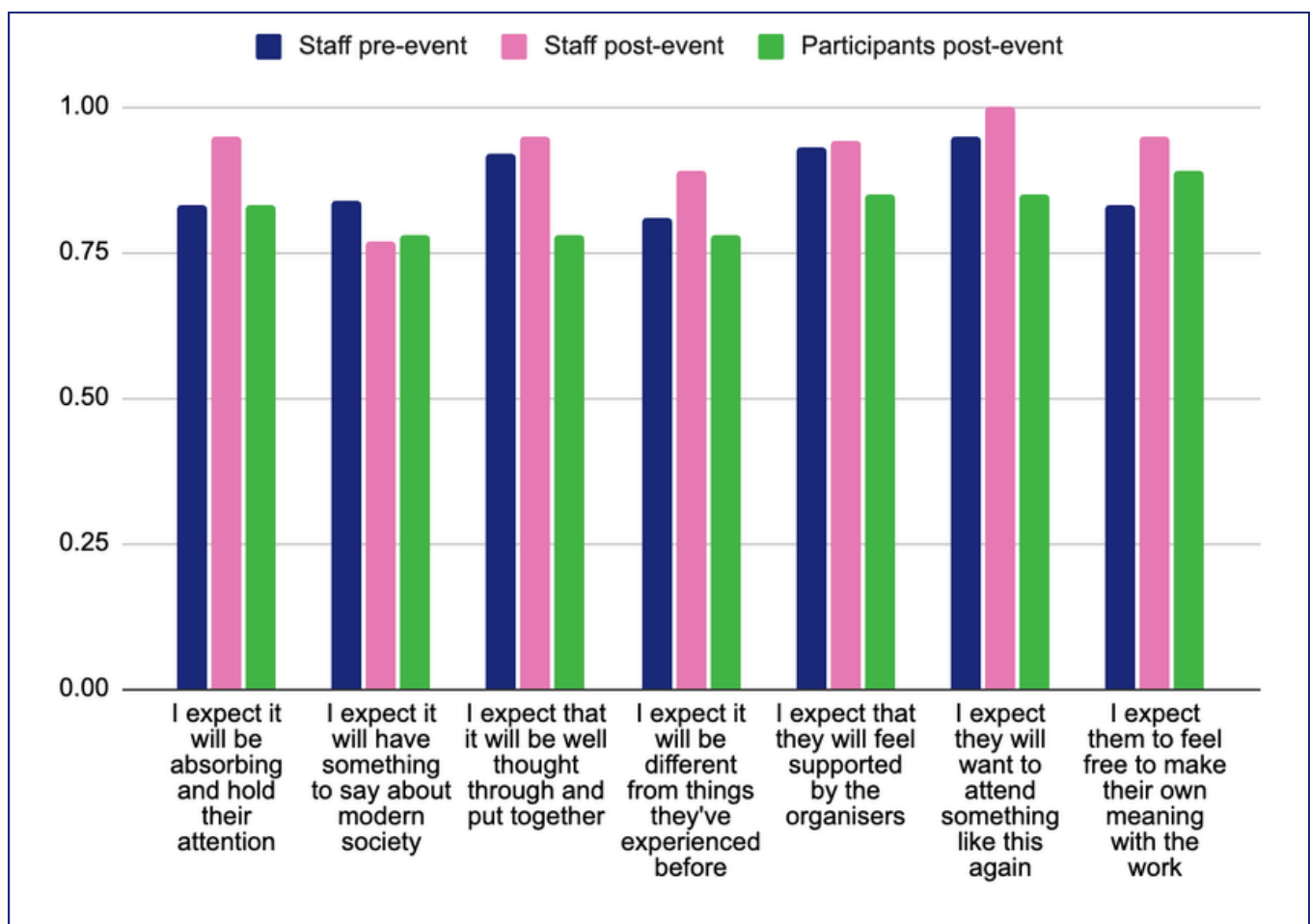
In 25-26, Impact & Insight assessments were undertaken for the following events:

- **Come With Us at Greenwich & Docklands International Festival.**
- **Evim (My Home)**
- **Doodling Is Good For Us**
- **Playmakers' Feast**



Come With Us at Greenwich & Docklands International Festival. Credit: Creative Crawley

Come With Us at Greenwich & Docklands International Festival

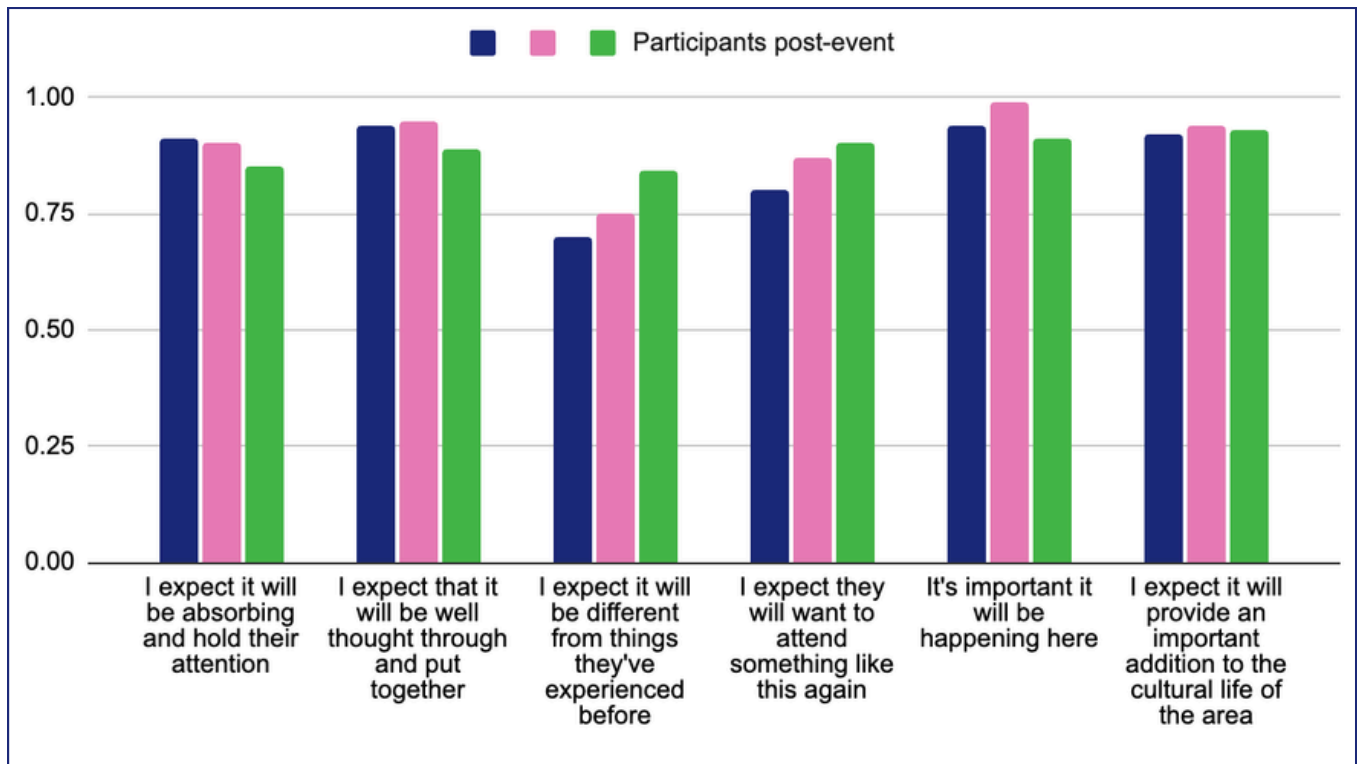


1 = Strongly Agree, 0 = Strongly Disagree.

Participants responded well to this Come With Us event, with all dimensions rated an average of 0.78 or higher. On all but one dimension, the staff team predicted a higher impact on participants than the participants themselves rated. This was most pronounced for **'I expect that it will be well thought through and put together'** (difference -0.17).



evim (my home)



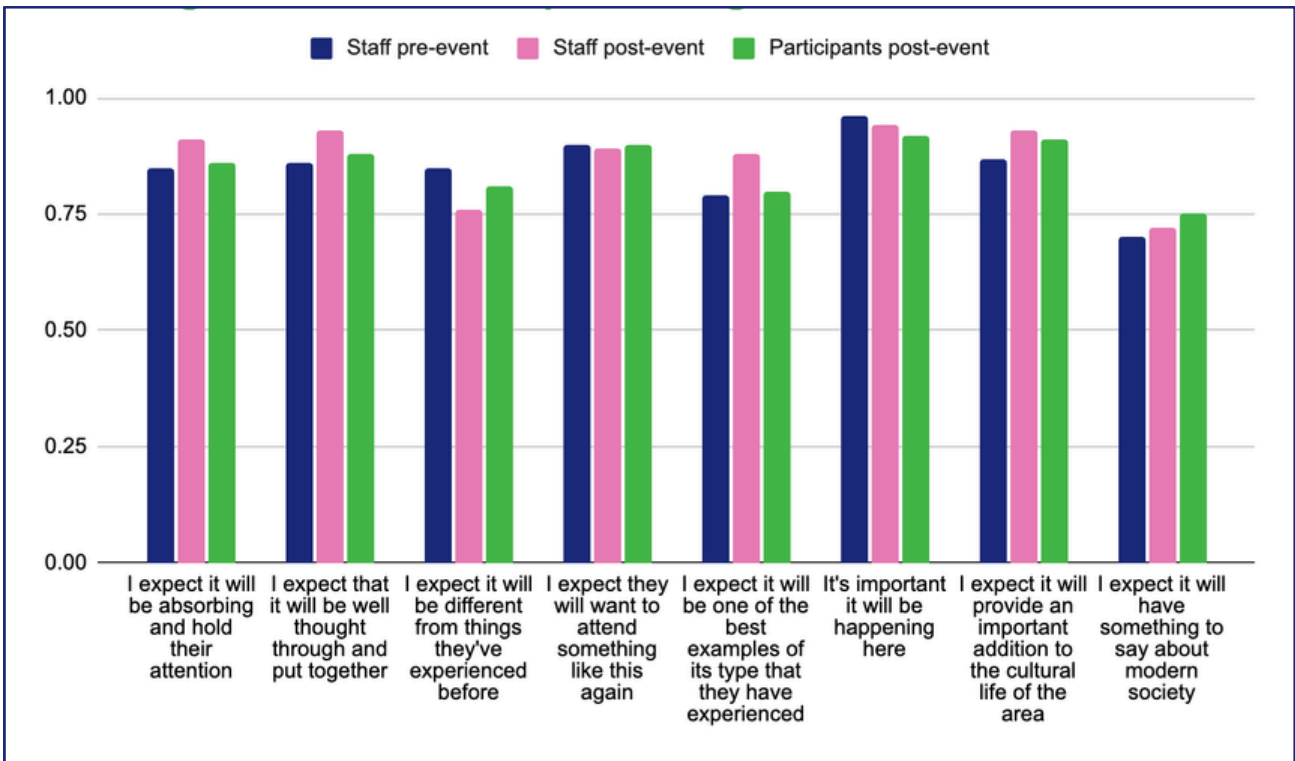
Evim saw relatively small differences between staff and participant post-event reflection. However, audiences found the event more distinctive **"I expect it will be different from things they've experienced before"** than staff did before the event (difference 0.14).



Doodling Is Good For Us. Credit: Simon Edwards

Doodling Is Good For Us

“I have had lovely conversations with people I don’t know. I would normally feel nervous to do this but the atmosphere was so relaxed and welcoming”
 Participant, Doodling is Good for Us

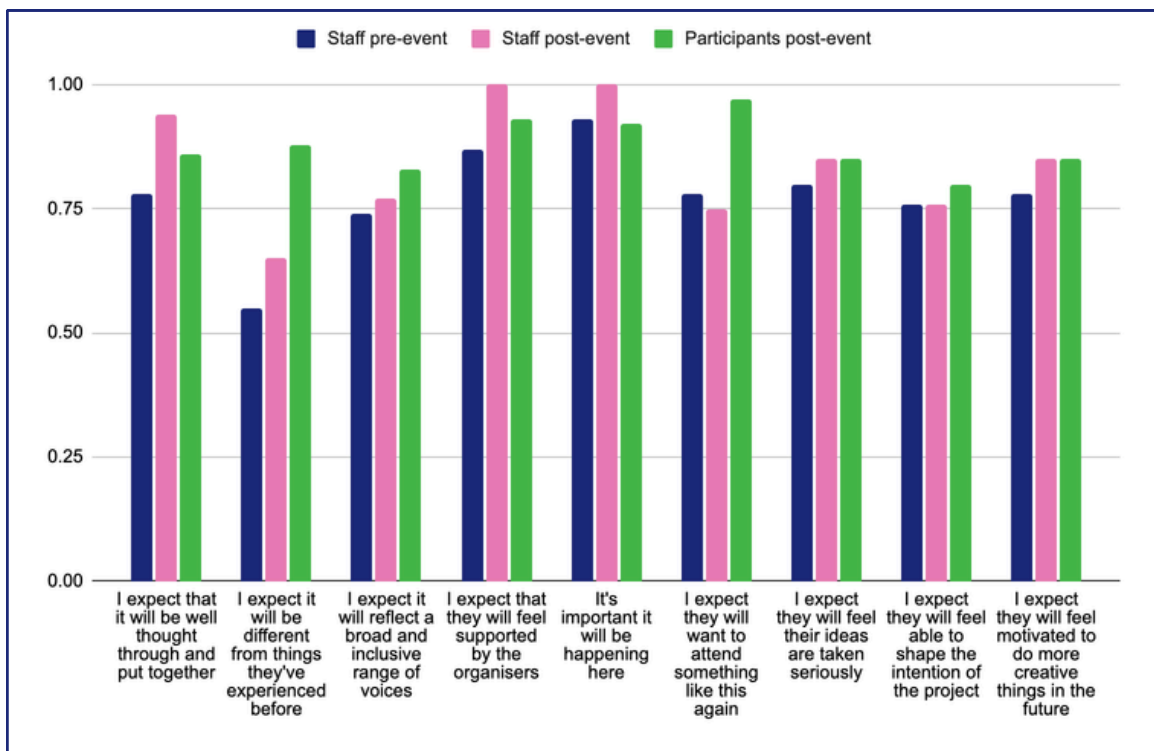


Of the four Impact & Insight surveys in 25-26, Doodling Is Good For Us saw the closest connection between Staff and Participant views - with small difference across most dimensions. This suggests that staff are in tune with audiences and participants, and effectively able to gauge how they will respond to events and activities.



Playmaker Feast with Vicki Dela Adedume

“Since going to some Creative Crawley events, I have started writing for myself. I didn’t know I could write before, but now I am enjoying exploring this new skill that I have” Feast Playmaker



This event saw larger variation between staff and participant views on several dimensions. Notably, participants experienced the Playmaker Feast as more different (**'I expect it will be different from things they've experienced before'**) than staff expected them to think (difference 0.23). Staff may associate the Feasts as being regular events that are similar each time. However, different participants attend each event and therefore it may be experienced 'as new' each time. Similarly, participants had a greater desire to attend something like this again (difference 0.22) than staff expected, showing the value participants place on the Feasts and how much they enjoy them. Across all the Impact & Insight surveys and all dimensions, wanting to attend another Playmaker Feast was given the highest score (0.97).



Broadfield Conversations by Eloise Gillow: credit Ian Greenland

Case study: Crawley Murals

"The murals created by the Creative Playground project have enabled a different way of looking at public space in Crawley. I'm interested in continuing to work with Creative Crawley and develop the potential for arts and culture to have a positive impact on contextual safeguarding in the town." - Chief Inspector Steve Turner, Sussex Police

The Crawley Murals project was one of the first ideas instigated by Creative Playground in 2023, following conversations with local people who wanted to brighten up the town with art. Between August 2023 and May 2024, Creative Playground worked with 19 Playmakers to develop the ideas, and 350 people were involved in workshops with the artists to shape the design of the murals.

"I've been involved almost since the beginning and it's amazing seeing them here now. All the hard work put into it is all worth it. They look so good all around the town. I love the colours of this one in Bewbush. It is really different. It is going to make people feel safer. The tunnels look more inviting than before. Hopefully this will encourage people to come here rather than avoid it. It is even more amazing and impressive than I thought it would be." Murals Playmaker

There are now six murals around the town:

- **Broadfield Conversations** by Eloise Gillow at Broadfield Community Centre
- **Coloured Realms** by Oluwafemi Babalola at Bewbush Underpass
- **Crawley Oak** by Eloise Gillow at Kingsgate Car Park
- **Gateway to the World** by Alec Saunders at County Mall
- **The Fabric of Crawley 2024** by Sarah Pimenta at Crawley Hospital
- **The Place That Does It All** by Orakel Workshop at Manor Royal

The first five on the above list are accessible by foot. The Place That Does It All is predominantly viewed by vehicles travelling around the Hazelwick Flyover, a major gateway into the Manor Royal District.



The Place That Does It All by Orakel Workshop Credit: Ian Greenland

Crawley Murals engagement data

The number of people engaging with the murals has been estimated using the following methodology:

- Footfall counts of pedestrians walking past the murals, sampled at different times of day, days of the week, and times of year. These figures are then extrapolated to estimate the number of people walking past the murals during the year.
- Observing the number of pedestrians actively engaging (e.g. pausing to view) the murals. This led to us estimating that 30% of people passing the murals are actively engaging.
- The exception is the Manor Royal mural, where traffic statistics have been taken and estimated that 10% of drivers view the mural.

A similar methodology was used by Peterborough Presents CPP to estimate engagement with murals.

In 25-26, engagement with the murals is estimated to be:

- **Broadfield Community Centre** - 212,917
- **Bewbush Tunnels** - 41,981
- **Kingsgate Car Park** - 154,765
- **County Mall** - 484,172
- **Crawley Hospital** - 98,213
- **Manor Royal** - 1,651,500

Total engagement across the six murals is estimated to 2,643,548 active engagements in 25-26. This is an increase from 1,063,668 in 24-25, before the Manor Royal mural was completed. Excluding Manor Royal, pedestrian engagement is estimated to be 992,548.

This does not mean that 2,643,548 different people viewed the murals. Some residents, commuters and shoppers will have viewed the murals multiple times. From 26-27, we will use a revised methodology that reports a lower percentage of pedestrians and drivers engaging with the murals. This acknowledges that as the murals become part of the fabric of Crawley, novelty value will decrease and people will be less likely to actively engage. However, this does not detract from the more intangible benefits the murals bring to Crawley.



Mural participant with artist Alec Saunders. Photo: Creative Playground

Qualitative feedback and interviews demonstrate the murals' broad impact. This includes:

- **Enhancing community safety.** Chief Inspector Steve Turner, Sussex Police, has told us, "Some of the areas where the murals exist have changed those spaces and made them safer for the public to be in." A workshop participant told us, "The murals make me feel a positive feeling. This isn't a place you feel scared of now."
- **Encouraging walking and active travel.** Especially at Bewbush Tunnels, residents say that the murals provide a more inviting walking route through the area. "The tunnels look more inviting than before. Hopefully this will encourage people to come here rather than avoid it."
- **Investment** - Steve Sawyer, Executive Director of the Manor Royal Business Improvement District told us the Manor Royal mural has, "transformed the flyover into a welcoming landmark and symbol of positive change... making it a more investable place and a better place to come to work and have your business."
- **Community pride** - Residents told us how the murals give a better impression of the town for residents and visitors alike. "I grew up in Crawley. I think that Crawley has gone downhill in later years, you see a lot of graffiti. These murals make the town look cared for." "I think the murals are a really good idea. I think they bring a bit of storytelling to the town for anyone that is passing through and are something to remember in Crawley."
- **Connection to nature** - Several residents commented how the Crawley Oak mural at Kingsgate Car Park makes them feel more connected to nature. "My favorite is the one on Kingsgate Car Park. It's a massive tree. It definitely brightens up the area, and it changes the environment from a built up area to being more about nature." "I love the murals that show trees, mountains, sky. Natural things,"



The Playground Tour at Three Bridges Primary School, Credit: Creative Crawley

Four years of Creative Playground

Arts Council England key research questions

1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by arts and culture?

Diverse audiences

Creative Playground reaches a diverse audience reflective of Crawley's demographic makeup:

- In 24-25, the programme effectively engaged Global Majority communities, with 25% of survey respondents identifying as such, closely matching Crawley's population (26.6%). In 25-26, this representation increased slightly to 26.1%, demonstrating sustained success in reflecting Crawley's ethnic diversity.
- In 25-26, 11% of respondents identified as disabled, while 23% identified as neurodiverse (7% identified as both). These figures have remained consistent across both years where data is available - and suggest Creative Playground is particularly strong at engaging neurodiverse audiences.
- In 25-26, the proportion of audience members in the less affluent West of Crawley area (RH11) increased from 31% to 51%, showing progress in socioeconomic diversity. This was also reflected in people from a wider range of occupations taking part in the programme.

"This is so special for the children. Many of them will not have seen dance like this. To have it in their school playground makes it even more special" KS2 Teacher, Broadfield Primary Academy

Four years of Creative Playground

Inspiring participants

Participants express strong enthusiasm for future engagement:

- The average rating for the statement **"I would like to see/take part in something similar again"** was 4.78 out of 5, an increase from 4.64 in 24-25.

Feedback highlights the programme's role in fostering pride, belonging, and community connection. For example, participants reported stronger agreement with statements such as:

- **"I am proud to be from Crawley"** (average score increased from 3.68 to 4.12 after engagement)
- **"Creativity is part of daily life here"** (average score increased from 3.37 to 4.03)



Creative Crawley Open Day, Woodzy Credit: Ian Greenland

"I am excited to be a part of something like Creative Playground as I'm not really very creative myself, but I can see it's a group of people who care and like making positive things happen in the town. It feels good to be part of a community" Participant, Playmaker Feast

2. To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and culture and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?

A dynamic programme

Creative Playground's programme has been highly varied, mixing large-scale events with high-quality collaboration and grassroots initiatives.

24-25 saw a strong emphasis on large-scale Beacon events (72% of audience), such as Around The Lake and the Crawley Murals, which raised the town's profile as a cultural destination.

25-26 shifted focus toward Foundation events, building towards the Town Wide Festival in 2027.

World-class artists and creative organisations were brought to Crawley, several of whom might not have visited the town without the influence of Creative Playground. These include Luke Jerram, Victoria Melody, Chad Taylor, The Place and RPO.



Audience response

Participants consistently rated their experiences highly:

- In 24-25, participants gave an average rating of 4.79/ 5 for their overall experience, with all critical perspectives scoring above 4/ 5. In 25-26, the overall experience rating increased to 4.84/ 5, with 4.76/ 5 for both local impact and cultural contribution.
- First-time engagers in both years highlighted the supportive and inclusive nature of the programme: "Scared to take part initially. So glad I did." (Crawley Pride). "Thank you for looking after us so well. I wouldn't have been able to come without it." (Come With Us trip).
- Some sections of the audience consistently had stronger and more positive reactions to the programme. Global majority participants consistently had higher levels of satisfaction and reported more pronounced impact on seeing, thinking, feeling and doing than the average across the entire sample.
- Neurodiverse participants reported strong changes in perception of **"Creativity is part of daily life here"** (e.g. before 3.07; after 4.14 in 24-25).
- Frequent arts engagers generally had lower levels of pride in Crawley before taking part (3.71) but this increased after taking part to 4.18.
- Young people under 25 showed greatest positive change for **"Everyone is welcome here"**.

3. Which approaches were successful and what were the lessons learned?

Examples of successful approaches

Creative Playground's community-led, co-creative, and accessible approaches have consistently resonated with audiences:

1 Public art - Crawley Murals acted as conversation starters and raised the programme's profile. Once the final mural was completed, there were an estimated 2.6 million engagements during a single year. Feedback highlighted improved safety and community pride.

Four years of Creative Playground

2 Cultural representation - Creative Playground has consistently prioritised supporting and representing artists that reflect Crawley's significant diversity. Feedback from the Around The Lake festival included many reflections on how the event felt representative of Crawley and appreciation seeing artists who represented attendees and their communities. Global Majority participants now make up 26% of audiences - roughly equivalent to Crawley's overall Global Majority population.

3 Evolution of the Playmaker approach - After experimenting with different methods, the team has now settled on a combination of welcoming Playmaker Feasts and Open Days for larger numbers of people who want to get involved, and Playmakers Groups to work consistently on specific events e.g. Crawley Murals and Fashion Show in 2023-25 and the Town Wide Festival from 2026.

4 Variations of scale - Across the years, the Creative Playground programme has varied vastly in scale from large events e.g. Around The Lake to intimate sessions, such as Victoria Melody's work at Freeshop Bewbush. There is a positively reinforcing cycle - when the programme focuses on smaller-scale projects (the Foundations strand), these build towards landmarks every couple of years. The Foundations events tend to have more impact on individual participants, who report changes in their own behaviour or how they feel about Crawley. The larger events bring in more people (including from outside Crawley), raise the programme's profile, and change perspectives on the arts and creativity in Crawley more widely.

5 Deep listening - As the years have progressed, the team has become more confident in ambitious, longer-term work involving deep listening with communities. The standout example of this is Victoria Melody's residency at Bewbush Freeshop, working with local residents and helping them develop the confidence to perform stand-up comedy.

Lessons learned

1. Socioeconomic diversity

24-25 data showed 31.1% of audiences were from the target west of Crawley (RH11) area, which experiences more socioeconomic challenges. 25-26 saw a rebalancing towards RH11 with 51% of respondents from the west of Crawley. There was also an increase in people from occupation groups such as 'routine, semi-manual and service occupations' and 'small business owners'.

This is at least part a result of deliberate programming decisions, for example the residency at Bewbush Freeshop and the prioritisation of west Crawley schools for the Playground Tour.

2. Opportunities for neurodiverse people

24-25 data showed that neurodiverse people were least likely to feel that creativity is part of everyday life in Crawley, but their belief changed after taking part in a Creative Playground event. In 25-26, more focus was given to neurodiversity - from the RPO Relaxed concert to in-depth, co-created work on a film in collaboration with the Dimensions charity.

Four years of Creative Playground

3. Access and care

Experience has led to increased consideration of access and care in Creative Playground activities, for both:

- Participants - e.g. building in more time during long days, providing taxis or other travel support.
- Staff, volunteers and freelancers - Trauma-informed training was introduced for staff working in sensitive community spaces (e.g., Bewbush Freeshop).

4. Evaluation

Lessons learned here fall into three categories:

- Representation - In 24-25 infrequent engagers were less likely to answer diversity monitoring questions (e.g., 23.1% preferred not to disclose ethnicity vs. 10.1% of frequent engagers). This made it harder to determine the demographic characteristics of the audience, including around socioeconomic status. In 25-26, this discrepancy had almost disappeared, with far fewer participants preferring not to disclose this information. This is likely to at least in part be due to more in-person data collection, with people representing Crawley's diverse communities asking the questions.
- Consistency - Prior to 2024, different evaluation questions were asked at different events, making it challenging to draw conclusions across the programme. This was streamlined with a set of key questions, in addition to the mandatory Illuminate questions, that were broadly applied across all online and paper surveys.
- Smart targets - Smart targets in the Business Plan were initially complicated, covering 15 outcomes over six aims. There are now four aims, making the process of reporting to the board and funders against targets somewhat more streamlined.

Four years of Creative Playground

Theory of Change Outcomes

The Four Outcomes of Creative Playground's Theory of Change are:

1. **I see things differently**
2. **I think differently**
3. **I feel differently**
4. **I will do things differently**

Participants consistently reported that Creative Playground helped them gain new perspectives, whether about their community, creativity, or themselves. While the average score dipped slightly in 25-26, the programme maintained a strong impact, particularly for Global Majority participants, infrequent engagers, and young people.

I see things differently

Overall scores:

- 24-25: 4.03/5, indicating a growing ability to shift perspectives.
- 25-26: 3.95/5, a slight decrease but still well above neutral.
- Global Majority participants reported that the programme was more likely to make them see things differently than the entire sample. In 25-26, their impact was more pronounced across all four Theory of Change dimensions.
- Infrequent engagers showed higher impact in this dimension, suggesting the programme opens new perspectives for those with less prior arts engagement.

Qualitative feedback:

- "To see the different backgrounds of different people that are around and the volume of people and the number of activities. It's a positive thing." (24-25)
- "This was a wonderfully choreographed production... Lots for me to think about and appreciate." (Closer To My Dreams, 25-26)



Fashion Show for Crawley. Credit: Simran Kaur

I think differently

While this outcome saw slightly lower scores than the others, it remained a key area of impact, particularly for Global Majority participants and infrequent engagers. The programme's ability to stimulate critical thinking was evident in events that encouraged reflection on modern society and local identity.

Overall scores:

- 24-25: 3.85/5
- 25-26: 3.84/5

Global Majority participants reported that the programme was more likely to make them think differently than the entire sample.

Event highlights:

24-25: Fashion Show for Crawley (4.27/5) and Saturday Sessions (4.22/5) were particularly effective, with the Fashion Show scoring 4.45/5 for "It has something to say about modern society."

25-26: Closer To My Dreams stood out, with all respondents giving it a score of 5/5 for "It has something to say about modern society."

Foundation events in 25-26 had a greater impact than Beacon events, reinforcing the value of participatory, discussion-based activities.

Four years of Creative Playground

3. I feel differently

This was the highest-scoring outcome, demonstrating Creative Playground's strong emotional impact on participants. The programme consistently fostered pride, belonging, and confidence, particularly among Global Majority, neurodiverse, and infrequent engagers.

Overall scores:

- 24-25: 4.07/5 (the highest of the four outcomes).
- 25-26: 3.98/5 (slightly lower but still the highest outcome).
- Global majority, disabled, 16 to year old and infrequent arts engagers all reported higher levels of 'I feel differently'.

Qualitative feedback:

- "I have extreme social anxiety... now I have seen the show and I have met you guys. I think I will be ok to have a conversation." (Come With Us with Victoria Melody, 25-26)

4. I will do things differently

While this was the lowest-scoring outcome in 24-25, it improved in 25-26, suggesting the programme is becoming more effective at driving behavioural change. Foundation events and infrequent engagers showed the strongest responses, indicating that participatory, smaller-scale activities are key to embedding creativity into daily life.

Overall scores:

- 24-25: 3.77/5 (the lowest of the four outcomes, identified as an area for improvement).
- 25-26: 3.85/5 (improved by 0.08).
- Global Majority participants in both years reported that the programme was more likely to make them do things differently than the entire sample.
- Infrequent engagers in 25-26 showed the most pronounced impact on this outcome, suggesting the programme is successfully inspiring new habits in this group.
- Foundation events in 25-26 had the most pronounced impact on this outcome, with Closer To My Dreams and Playmaker Feasts standing out.

Four years of Creative Playground - Team Highlights



Sophie Eustace, Project Co-Director **Confidence and ambition**

"When we took a group of people to see Vic Melody's show in Brighton, and then brought it back to their local community centre - I don't think any of those people expected that to actually happen. Transforming a community hall into a professional-level theatre space is quite an achievement".



Becky Jones, Community Producer **Unexpected encounters**

"There's a real magic when people stumble across high quality creativity in everyday places. It disrupts the normalcy of everyday life. The encounters between artists and residents who have similar backgrounds are just gorgeous. They help people feel at home in Crawley."



Esme Davis, Producing and Production Assistant **Igniting dreams**

"When we did the garment making sessions, it really supported one of the project attendees, Elsa. She was working full-time but had a dream of being a fashion designer. During the sessions she went from being very shy to being much more confident and really using that environment."



Hannah Foley, General Manager **Powerful simplicity**

"Chad Taylor's Closer To My Dreams was so simple. It was a wonderful dance piece in the car park at the Charis Centre. It needed no stage or lights, but it transformed the space for the audience."



Louise Blackwell, Project Co-Director **Spreading the joy of creativity**

"Someone told me that they went to the hologram workshop with her son and husband, who don't ever take part in anything creative. They all enjoyed it so much they did a version at a friend's birthday party. I love people taking our work and including it in everyday creativity."

Four years of Creative Playground - Partnerships

This section gives short case studies of the different types of partnership that Creative Playground has developed since 2022. Each case study was written by Louise Blackwell (Project Co-Director).

Community Partner Outreach 3Way (part of the Dimensions Group)

Outreach 3Way/ Dimensions support learning disabled and autistic people. They first connected with Creative Playground through the Free Fridays workshops in West Green. What began as casual creative sessions quickly grew into a deeper relationship built on listening, trust and genuine co-creation.

Residents told us what they were curious about, so we introduced them to Brighton artists Leap Then Look and took the group to their Brighton Festival installation *100 Miles of String* in May 2024. They loved it. That enthusiasm shaped what came next.

Leap Then Look were developing *Play Interact Explore*, a touring exhibition, and invited the Dimensions group to help shape it. Through workshops in early 2025, participants influenced the ideas, materials and interactions that went into the final show, which opened in Unit 79/80 in County Mall. This was co-creation in action; residents' ideas literally built into the work.

We then organised a Come With Us trip to London to see *Frameless* in September 2025, deepening confidence, connection and ambition within the group.

Learning from our 24-25 evaluation, we committed to expanding our offer for people with learning disabilities and neurodivergence. Together with Dimensions participants, we co-designed a brief for a short film project, shortlisted artists and commissioned filmmaker Amara Bjorkhaug. Over three months in 2026, participants shaped every stage of the film — story, visuals, sound and themes. Their voices aren't just represented; they lead the work.

The result is our first fully co-created film: a surreal, imaginative piece that reflects both the challenges and the creative brilliance of the group. At the sharing event, families saw their loved ones in a new light; expectations shifted, confidence soared. The film will now be submitted to festivals and will premiere at *Crawley Fusion Mela* in July 2026 at Unit 79/80 County Mall.

This partnership shows what happens when artists, community groups and local businesses collaborate with genuine openness: residents become creators, not participants; their ideas shape public art; and their talents are recognised on a town-wide stage.

Four years of Creative Playground - Partnerships

Professional partner **The Place**

Our Directors had already built strong relationships with The Place before Creative Playground began, giving us a foundation of trust to build on. The first collaboration in 2022 — *Future Cargo*, a large-scale dance work performed on a 40ft truck — was delivered with Crawley Town Centre BID before CPP even launched. Over 250 people attended in Memorial Gardens, with audiences reflecting Crawley's diversity.

Once CPP funding was secured and our research confirmed how important dance is to local residents, we deepened the partnership. We presented Requardt & Rosenberg's *Super Normal Extra Natural* (produced by The Place) in County Mall, where local residents performed alongside the company as part of the show and more than 800 people watched the show.

The Place then invited us into their Playground Tour — short, adaptable dance works performed in primary school playgrounds. It brings high-quality dance directly to children and opens up conversations about creativity and future careers through post-show Q&As. Playmakers now help shortlist the work, joining national partners in the commissioning process. In 24-25, the tour was seen by 1,679 people in Crawley schools. In 25-26 the audience was larger at 2,179. The tour has also helped us build new relationships with primary schools in neighbourhoods we hadn't yet reached and strengthen existing ones.

The partnership has created individual opportunities too: a young female resident has received mentoring from dance professionals as a direct result of our work with The Place.

Four years of Creative Playground - Partnerships

Artist Victoria Melody

One of our Directors had worked with Victoria before Creative Playground, so we already knew she was a brilliant mentor with a gift for working across communities. When she approached us about a show exploring food poverty, we invited her to meet residents during the 2024 Around the Lake festival. We then connected her with Freeshop Crawley, a CPP consortium member and local foodbank.

Victoria became artist-in-residence there for six weeks, spending time in the café, listening to Bewbush residents — one of Crawley's most deprived neighbourhoods. During this period, some residents joined us for a Come With Us trip to see her show award winning show *Trouble, Struggle, Bubble and Squeak* at the Corn Exchange in Brighton. They loved it. When we asked if they wanted it in their own neighbourhood, the answer was an immediate yes.

Her deep, embedded work also revealed something else: residents wanted a space to laugh, express themselves and build confidence. So we supported her to set up a regular comedy workshop in Bewbush — an idea that came directly from the community.

We then brought her show *Trouble, Struggle, Bubble and Squeak* (Edinburgh Fringe and now Off-Broadway) to the Bewbush Centre, transforming the community hall into a theatre. Over 60 residents attended and the response was electric.

The impact has been profound. Participants from the comedy workshops — including people who previously struggled to leave their homes — recently performed stand-up for the first time in front of family and friends. Their confidence, connection and sense of belonging have grown dramatically. And through this process, we've gained a far deeper understanding of Bewbush and the people who live there.

This partnership shows what happens when artists listen deeply, when residents lead the direction of the work, and when creativity is rooted in real relationships.



Victoria Melody

Four years of Creative Playground - Partnerships

Development partner **Manor Royal**

Manor Royal Business Improvement District — led by Steve Sawyer — has been central to Creative Playground's success. As the South East's largest business district and the project's lead organisation for its first four years, Manor Royal has helped us reach not only Crawley residents but the tens of thousands of people who work here every day.

Through BID-led Invite Us events — from Manor Royal Matters to the Jobs Fair — we've met workers whose insights have directly shaped the CPP programme. Together we've hosted major events, including the 2023 gathering at Gatwick Production Studios, and introduced artists to Steve who have since been commissioned independently by the BID.

In 2024, we co-commissioned a landmark mural at the gateway to Manor Royal as part of our town-wide mural project. Employees helped select the artist and shape the design, embedding creativity directly into the working environment.

This partnership gives arts and culture a seat at the table in key town-leadership conversations. And because the BID has fully embraced culture as part of its strategy, we know Creative Playground isn't just delivering projects — it's helping shift how Crawley sees itself. The collaboration between business and the arts is creating real opportunities, raising ambition and ensuring creativity becomes part of everyday life for the people who live and work here.



Four years of Creative Playground

Internal reflections

Each quarter, the Creative Playground team comes together for a reflection session with evaluators Flying Geese. These sessions reflect on each individual event in the programme, before expanding out to explore progress against the three Arts Council England CPP research questions, and the theory of change.

Assessing the consistent themes in these discussions shows how the team's focus and concerns have evolved.

23-24 key themes

1. Establishing the Playmaker programme and involving them from the start in projects. Playmaker involvement in the Crawley Murals was an example of this working well.
2. Event installation and weather challenges, e.g. the Homecoming installation in Crawley town centre, Murals.
3. Developing internal processes - especially budgeting, financial and evaluation systems.
4. Managing important local partnerships to demonstrate Creative Playground's impact and gather support. These partners include local decision-makers including Manor Royal, Councillors and the Mayor.
5. Balancing ambition with limited time and resources - the busy-ness of the year and the pressure the team felt under.

24-25 key themes

1. Tailoring activity to specific communities. As the team made more local connections and gained confidence in its work, it was able to successfully engage new communities e.g. Afghan women, while identifying communities to work with in future e.g. Crawley's Tamil community.
2. The "Creative Playground" approach - gentle, playful, bold, and inclusive - has become recognisable, and is beginning to feel like a creative identity for the town.
3. Relationships with artistic partners and artists. They recognised a need for clearer role definitions and earlier interventions to avoid challenge e.g. community painting being a bit of an add on in some of the Mural projects. A significant operational issue was working out how to better host and support visiting artists, including travel, accommodation and on-site artist care.
4. Calling cards - use of the Book of Crawley and the Murals as 'calling cards' to showcase Creative Playground to local residents and stakeholders.
5. Playmaker progression. The team reflected on how Playmakers were transitioning from participants into true decision-makers. Playmakers took on prominent roles in interviewing artists and co-curating the Fashion Show, which built immense confidence and community ownership

Four years of Creative Playground

25-26 key themes

1. Research, development and planning the 2027 town-wide festival.
2. Socioeconomic diversity. Following recommendations in the 24-25 evaluation report, the team discussed how the programme could effectively reach people from all socioeconomic backgrounds, and if evaluation data was actually underrepresenting people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds due to survey methodology.
3. Staff care. With an increase in deep, in-depth activity in community spaces e.g. Bewbush Freeshop, the team highlighted the need to support staff and artists working in sensitive environments where participants might be discussing personal trauma.
4. Access support. Experiences at several events - especially Come With Us - highlighted the need for more thorough access planning and support for participants, for example providing taxis or building more time into the schedule.
5. Community partnerships, specifically, when to step in and take a more proactive approach to ensure quality when working with amateur or semi-professional partners without as much experience as the Creative Playground team.

Key progressions

From quantitative data, qualitative feedback and internal reflections, these are the key areas where Creative Playground has progressed over the three years of the project:

- **Audiences.** Louise Blackwell reflected, **“We don’t have to drag people into our stuff any more. People are knocking down our door. That feels like a shift.”** Major Beacons events in 25-26 e.g. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra sold out. But there was also more demand for Foundation events, with an increase in participation from 2,514 (24-25) to 3,904 people in 25-26.
- **Increased confidence and ambition as producers.** By the 2025-2026 period, the team explicitly noted that, compared to two years prior, they are much more confident in understanding what works in Crawley. They grew more comfortable using their producing expertise to help shape and adapt visiting projects so that they are truly effective for the local context, rather than just accepting them as-is. The residency at Bewbush Freeshop is the best example of confidence and ambition, involving deep listening and converting a community venue into a (temporary) professional theatre space. The staff team remains busy but generally less hurried.
- **Representing Crawley’s diversity.** Crawley is a town of significant ethnic and cultural diversity, with 26.6% of the population identifying as a Global Majority ethnicity. Creative Playground’s audience is broadly, and increasingly, reflective of this diversity. In 25-26, 26.1% of respondents identified as being from a global majority ethnic group, an increase from 25% in 24-25. Part of this journey has been deep engagement with specific communities e.g. Afghan women, Chagossian. This success is built on a creative programme with a prominent role for Global Majority artists from Crawley and elsewhere. Artist Cee Boulaqui said, **“I just want to say a massive thank you to CC and this group as it is the first time ever I have worked with people from my own community and I have learned so much from you and absolutely loved it.”**

Four years of Creative Playground

Key progressions (cont.)

- **Neurodiversity.** Creative Playground targeted increased engagement with neurodiverse residents in 25-26. This is reflected in a small increase in the overall percentage of neurodiverse audiences (23% vs 22%), but more significantly in an increased number of dedicated projects for learning disabled, autistic and neurodiverse people, such as the Dimensions film project.
- **Socioeconomic diversity.** Creative Playground is effectively engaging people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. 25-26 data shows an increase in participation from people of a variety of occupations, and that more than half of audience/ participants live in the less affluent west of Crawley (RH11) area.
- **Deepening influence in the town.** Between 24-25 and 25-26, there is evidence that Infrequent engagers with arts and culture are seeing Creative Playground as increasingly valuable to Crawley. In 24-25, Infrequent Engagers gave lower scores for 'It is important that it is happening here' and 'It provides an important addition to the cultural life of the area,' compared to frequent engagers. This year the scores are almost identical. This suggests that infrequent attenders are starting to value arts and culture more highly as part of the fabric and life of the town. This is corroborated by qualitative feedback from residents (e.g. on the Crawley murals) and partners (e.g. Manor Royal). Support-in-kind was secured from Crawley College, County Mall, Charis Centre, West Sussex County Council and Crawley Borough Council.
- **Maturing evaluation and impact demonstration.** Evaluation has evolved from something of a scattergun approach with different questions for different events, to a more rigorous process with consistent quantitative data collection matched by gathering qualitative testimonies and case studies. The next step is to make evaluation more consistent between the Creative Playground programme and the work of Creative Crawley as a whole.
- **Playmakers and community decision-makers.** A range of different approaches were tried. First Playmaker Panels, then Playmaker Parties, and now Playmaker Feasts. Community Connectors evolved into Community Programmers. The model has been refined so that different Playmaker teams work on different projects e.g. Murals, Fashion Show, Town Wide Festival, giving specific focus for defined periods of time.

Consistent challenges

The following have been consistent challenges throughout the four years. In each case, the team has taken steps to mitigate the challenges:

- **Communication and fundraising.** It has been hard to get the balance right between communicating Creative Playground as a programme and Creative Crawley as an organisation. For example, two separate websites were created, which share a lot of the same information and require double maintenance. Creative Crawley has invested in specialist consultancy to tell the programme's story and support fundraising, which remains a challenge beyond core ACE funding. Nevertheless, the match funding target has been reached and support in-kind from Crawley organisations has been significant. The key challenges are trusts, foundations and corporate support.

Four years of Creative Playground

Consistent challenges (cont.)

The following have been consistent challenges throughout the four years. In each case, the team has taken steps to mitigate the challenges:

- **Community partnerships and professional standards.** Creative Playground has developed strong local partnerships in Crawley. However, one of the more consistent discussions in reflection meetings is where to step in and intervene when they see partners struggling in matters of varying severity from marketing to health and safety. This is particularly important in the Boost programme, and with Invite Us events hosted at Creative Playground's space in County Mall. The ideal balance to work towards is giving agency while also supporting to skill up local partners.
- **Access and care.** Creative Playground work is increasingly taking it into spaces where participants have high access needs and/ or have experienced trauma. Steps have been taken to build in support and care for artists and staff in these scenarios, and to provide the right support to participants undertaking new activities or travelling further afield than they are used to. This is ongoing work and dependent on resources.
- **Evaluation.** ACE's requirement that CPPs use two distinct evaluation platforms - Illuminate and Impact & Insight - creates extra work in streamlining data for annual evaluations. There is a consistent trade off made between longer online surveys, which give more detail but are less accessible, and shorter, more accessible paper surveys. The combined approach has meant that more surveys from a wider range of people have been received. However, the most detailed data still comes from those who have the time to complete online surveys.
- **Level of delivery.** The amount of activity delivered by Creative Playground is significant, especially with few extra resources coming in via trusts and foundations and corporate support. This has led to the approach of having high intensity years with large-scale events, followed by more reflective years such as 25-26. However, even 25-26 has involved 105 events, on average almost one every three days. The team needs to think more about when it can or needs to say 'no' to ideas and requests.

Four years of Creative Playground

Implications and recommendations

Planning and strategy

- The space at County Mall has been important for increasing audience numbers, hosting events by partner organisations and festivals, and enhancing the sense that creativity is part of everyday life in Crawley. It is vital that Creative Playground retains access to the space, both for its own activities and for supporting the ambitions of other artists and creatives in the town.
- The Boost programme of seed commissions to local creatives remained in limbo in 25-26, with only two projects supported. External support or partnership may be needed to unlock this, for example in conjunction with organisations offering specialist employment or small business support. Establishing such a partnership could bring in new resources and make the programme more fundable.

Activity

- The Playmaker Feast with Vicki Dela Amedume was given full marks by all Impact & Insight respondents for "It is important that it is happening here". Vicki inspired Playmakers are provided a role model for a successful female, Global Majority artistic director. As well as bringing more inspirational global majority artists, this burgeoning strand of work should be expanded to include inspirational disabled and neurodiverse artists, especially as 23% of Creative Playground participants identify as neurodiverse.
- Creative Playground's theory of change prioritises creating change in how participants See, Feel, Think and Do after being involved with the programme. Several events - notably Solstic in 25-26 - have received lower audience scores for See, Feel, Think, Do but are nevertheless highly rated for enjoyment and on placemaking metrics. The team should consider that some events can just be for fun, especially if they bring people into contact with Creative Playground for the first time, enliven a space, or provide an economic boost to the town centre.
- The 16 to 25 age group has remained under-represented in survey data through the life of Creative Playground. In 25-26, a very small proportion of events were targeted at this age group. This should be a priority for future years.
- 1/6th of survey respondents were men. It is not known whether this is simply because men were less likely to complete surveys, or if fewer men are taking part overall. This needs further investigation. Specific programmes around male mental health and wellbeing may help Creative Playground reach a new audience, potentially with a focus on the 16 to 25 age group.

Four years of Creative Playground

Implications and recommendations (cont.)

Evaluation and action research

- With a wide variety of events and audiences, evaluation for Creative Playground is always going to require flexibility. A happy balance has been struck between consistency and adapting methods for different audiences (e.g. shorter paper surveys vs longer online). It will never be perfect, but as the number of people contributing feedback has increased in 25-26, despite overall audience numbers decreasing, it is recommended that a similar approach is used moving forward.
- Global majority participants consistently rate the programme more highly than the overall sample. Specific investigation (e.g. in-depth interviews) should be undertaken to understand the reasons for this and underlying mechanism of change.
- The County Mall space has given opportunities for more partners to stage events in partnership with Creative Playground. Possible impacts of this may not be covered by the current evaluation methodology e.g. boost to partners and local businesses in County Mall. A distinct evaluation of the County Mall space may also help bring in funding for this aspect of the work.

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