

**Right  
Up  
Our  
Street**

**Phase  
one**

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**Final evaluation**

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Street

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***“It is common, when people talk of the arts in Doncaster, to hear about a place where the arts have no value; no place in people’s lives... this is not a place we recognise. The Doncaster we know is full of artists, musicians, writers and performers; full of people who think creatively and value imagination; full of choirs, bands, theatre companies and galleries. Time after time, we have seen that when local people have the chance to engage with great art they respond with enthusiasm, imagination and pleasure”*** (darts et al., 2013 pg 5)

## Introduction

Right Up Our Street (RUOS) was a three year action research programme, which took place in Doncaster between 2013-2016. Funded by Arts Council England’s Creative People and Places fund (CP&P), the programme was managed by a consortium of local partners, which included darts (Doncaster Community Arts), Doncaster Voluntary Arts Network (DVAN), Doncaster Culture & Leisure Trust (DCLT) and Cast (the town’s new performing arts venue). As critical friend and evaluator Dr Leila Jancovich of Leeds Beckett University also sat on both the local consortium and the national steering group of Creative People and Places. This report summarises the findings from the action research and the key learning from the programme.

## Background

Right Up Our Street was initiated on the premise that there was already a wealth of untapped creative talent in Doncaster but under investment and poor infrastructure had limited the ability to realise its potential. RUOS’s vision therefore was to create and deliver a ***“programme of imaginative, inspiring art coupled with focused community engagement”*** (darts et al., 2013 pg 5) which would both ***“celebrate and elevate”*** local cultural practice. This was done through a combination of providing opportunities for local artists’ development and involving local people in defining the local cultural offer. From the outset three key challenges were identified:

- how to ensure the long term legacy for the work undertaken through short term funding
- how to balance working in depth with those new to the arts, against working at breadth to engage the large and disparate needs of the whole of Doncaster

The evaluation of the first two years laid out the strategies used to deliver the programme and provided a detailed narrative of the programme (Jancovich, 2015). This final evaluation focuses on what was achieved and lessons learned from the process. In summary RUOS’s overarching ambition was to increase engagement in and awareness of the arts. It aimed to improve information about arts activity across Doncaster by creating ***“a ‘what’s on guide’, box office and community hub for the town”*** (darts et al., 2013 pg 14) and to provide new arts activities through three strands of work, described as the DNA of the arts in Doncaster. Each strand addressed the challenges outlined above through different approaches summarised below.

**D strand** was delivered by Cast, Doncaster’s new performance venue, through commissions for 3 new productions ***“drawn from local stories, memories, folklore”*** (darts et al., 2013 pg 12). The productions of ***Glee Club, Kes*** and ***Dancehall***, combined familiar stories with contemporary theatrical approaches, and were performed by professional actors alongside community ensemble performers. The main aim was to test whether using familiar stories could attract an audience not used to attending the theatre. It was further hoped that the community ensemble would provide an opportunity for dialogue between the theatre and local people about the venue’s development and potentially provide pathways for local people into the profession. Each piece also had an outdoor element. In year one Slung Low were commissioned to present ***Cast of Thousands***; in year two the main performance of ***Kes*** started outdoors; and in year 3 Cast co-commissioned Artonik’s

**Colour of Time** in collaboration with Docklands and Greenwich Festival. Each of these created a spectacle to engage audiences who might resist crossing the threshold into the main theatre, and in so doing aimed to break down barriers to the venue.

**N strand** was delivered by a Creative Producer who managed a commissioning pot for new work from both local and national artists. The target was to commission 50 new works over the life of the project, in the town centre and in outlying areas. In practice 23 new commissions were delivered plus two town centre festivals which provided an additional 100 showcase opportunities for artists. The commissions included ticketed performances and free outdoor events, work in traditional arts spaces as well as in unusual non-arts spaces, surprise encounters and longer term community engagement projects. Community members were involved in the commissioning process with the intention that the programme would be **“driven by what we discover local communities and artists want”** (darts et al., 2013 pg 12). The aim was to build the capacity of local artists and local communities to support a more vibrant creative scene in Doncaster.

**A strand** placed Arts Supporters in five designated communities for the three years of the programme, with the intention that they would develop local arts hubs. The aim was that by engaging in formal and informal conversations about the arts at a hyper local level they would **“discover more about what’s preventing engagement; and help overcome those barriers”** (darts et al., 2013 pg 12). Five artists were initially recruited who worked by building community teams, and provided a menu of 90 different arts projects locally. The focus was on using their artistic skills to facilitate and develop latent creativity in their communities and build the local capacity to deliver arts activities, giving the communities ownership of work locally and leaving a more sustainable local community infrastructure.

Combined, the three strands provided **2,500 opportunities to take part which attracted over 100,000 participations** in traditional arts venues, outdoor arts, large scale spectacles to small scale workshops, professional artists to amateur arts and crafts. The programme supported skills development of approximately 150 professional artists, and 50 amateur performers in the community ensemble, as well as supporting the creation of 10 new amateur arts groups, 9 paid interns and 110 volunteers. This has the potential to leave a lasting legacy through having built the **capacity of a team of individuals**. In addition the programme achieved its aim of reaching those not previously engaged in the arts with **2/3 of those taking part not having engaged in the arts in the previous 12 months**. This evaluation considers how the approaches RUOS used, together and separately, achieved the aims of the programme and what lessons were learned from the process.

## Methodology

This report draws on data captured over the three years of the programme, through a range of methods and from a range of sources. In line with the ethos of the programme the aim was to capture different points of view, from consortium members to staff, artists to participants, and so to avoid the tendency in arts evaluation to rely on the views of “experts” through self and peer review.

Qualitative methods were used to enable people to respond in **depth** about their experiences of the programme, alongside quantitative data on who and how many were engaged, to analyse the **breadth** of those taking part. Methods used are summarised in the table below.

METHOD	CONTENT	ANALYSIS
Desk research	existing research on arts participation comparison with other CP&P areas	contextualised and compared research findings
Minutes of meetings	consortium and community teams	reviewed process and decision making and captured a range of viewpoints
Quantitative surveys of participation	captured at all events through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- box office data</li> <li>- registers at workshops</li> <li>- headcounts and postcode samples at outdoor events</li> </ul>	analysed through Upshot CRM system to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- measure how many and who</li> <li>- assess RUOS achievements at reaching those new to the arts</li> <li>- compare outputs for activities</li> </ul>
Quantitative data on activities	captured by staff including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- artists involved</li> <li>- days worked</li> <li>- art forms and activity type</li> </ul>	analysed through Upshot CRM system to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify outputs from programme</li> <li>- examine relationship between activities and audience</li> </ul>
Postcode analysis	captured through quantitative methods above	analysed as part of national evaluation by Audiences Agency to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- compare RUOS data with national data on arts engagement</li> </ul>
Written reports	staff reports using Arts Council templates	thematic analysis, using Nvivo software to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- capture deep reflection on practice</li> <li>- examine relationship between aims, activities, inputs, outputs, outcomes</li> <li>- identify challenges and learning</li> </ul>
Interviews	quarterly face to face with staff teams one off with sample of artists and participants recorded and transcribed by research assistant	thematic analysis, using Nvivo software to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- capture deep reflection on practice</li> <li>- examine relationship between aims, activities, inputs, outputs, outcomes</li> <li>- identify challenges and learning</li> <li>- give voice to participants and artists</li> </ul>
Focus group meetings	one off with groups of artists one off with community representatives	thematic analysis, using Nvivo software to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- give voice to participants and artists</li> </ul>
Case studies	written case studies on sample of activities	illustrated examples of practice and learning
Peer review	press coverage written feedback from colleagues social media staff team reviews of each other's work	assessed outputs and outcomes from a range of perspectives
Community review	community team evaluation meetings community reviewers trained through RUOS Right On Our Radio arts programme commissioned by RUOS Doncopolitan arts magazine commissioned by RUOS social media	assessed outputs and outcomes from a range of perspectives
Creative evaluation	films of participant journeys photography at events	visually captured responses

When the Arts Council stopped funding for the Active People survey which provided the baseline data on arts participation in CPP areas, it was recommended that street surveys should be

collected at the start and end of the project to compare any perceptual shift in awareness of or attitudes to the arts in Doncaster, but it proved difficult for the RUOS team to administer. As a result this evaluation reports on the experience of RUOS from a range of participants involved in the programme but it does not capture whether there was a perceptual shift, nor the views of those not engaged nor the reasons for their lack of engagement. While it is acknowledged by the evaluator that this is a common to most arts research it is important to note this as a limitation.

The original RUOS plan also intended to capture data through an arts loyalty card which could be swiped to incentivise and record engagement, but when developing the IT strategy it was not deemed feasible on a local level. Its absence limited the reliability of collection of quantitative data, in particular in relation to the number of new or repeat attendance and crossovers between activities discussed below. While samples of this data provide a level of robustness to the findings it does limit the level of analysis of engagement on individual's participation journey.

The key findings from the programme were reviewed with staff annually by Dr Leila Jancovich as critical friend and Elaine Hirst as the action research lead within RUOS and Duncan Robertshaw as chair of the consortium. This ensured that learning informed the development of plans throughout the programme rather than merely informing the written evaluation at the end. As a result of these reviews changes were made to staffing structures, commissioning processes and budget priorities. For example the initial plan was to have five Arts Supporters based in five designated communities, but a review at the end of year one identified that this model did not work in two of the communities and so a new strategy was developed. Similarly the large turnout for DNWeekeND demonstrated the importance of town centre events to raise the profile of the arts across the district, which led to the decision to commission Colour of Time in year 3. Finally the learning from the community commissions in year one, which relied on an open call approach to artists but did not get enough response, fed into the approach in year two, which took a more proactive approach to inviting artists to submit ideas.

This final report was written by Dr Leila Jancovich, with support from research assistants Ryan Madin on interrogation of quantitative data and Lauren Townsend writing summary case studies. It is structured to analyse how RUOS addressed the Arts Council's three research questions:

1. are more people experiencing and inspired by the arts?
  2. to what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
  3. which approaches were successful and what were the lessons learned?
- (Arts Council England, 2012)

To answer question one this report draws on findings from the quantitative data on participants and activities as well as the postcode analysis undertaken by the Audience Agency. In addition there is some exploration of the marketing processes, to evaluate RUOS's aim to become a "trusted friend" for information about the arts in Doncaster.

The second question uses qualitative data collected from the range of participants described in the methodology, some exploring the process and some the values and outcomes of the programme. This included media coverage, community feedback and social media. Two meetings with the staff team and two focus groups with artists and participants also directly addressed this question.

The final question takes up the majority of this report and is organised around the activities and themes that emerged through the action research and are covered in the evaluation of the first two years (Jancovich, 2015). These became internal research questions for RUOS and the learning from them is summarised with examples from practice.

Finally the report explores issues of sustainability for the programme as it moves to Phase Two.

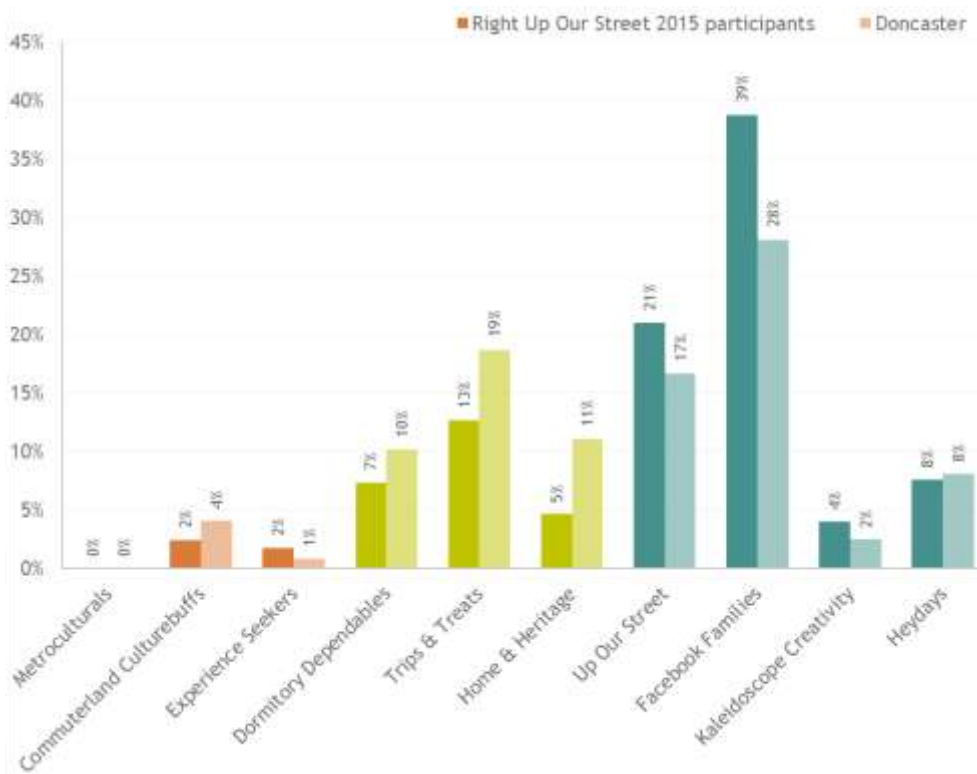
# 1. How do we know more people are experiencing and inspired by art?

Over the three years of Right Up Our Street approximately 120 arts projects were delivered by over 400 artists, which included:

- 90 local projects developed with and in the 5 communities, from workshop programmes to performances to events
- 23 new commissions for artists both from Doncaster and outside, all of which were selected with input from community teams
- 2 town centre festivals, where 100 local professional and amateur artists were showcased
- 3 new productions at Cast which provided opportunities for amateurs to rehearse and perform alongside professionals
- 2 large scale outdoor touring shows delivered to raise awareness among passers by

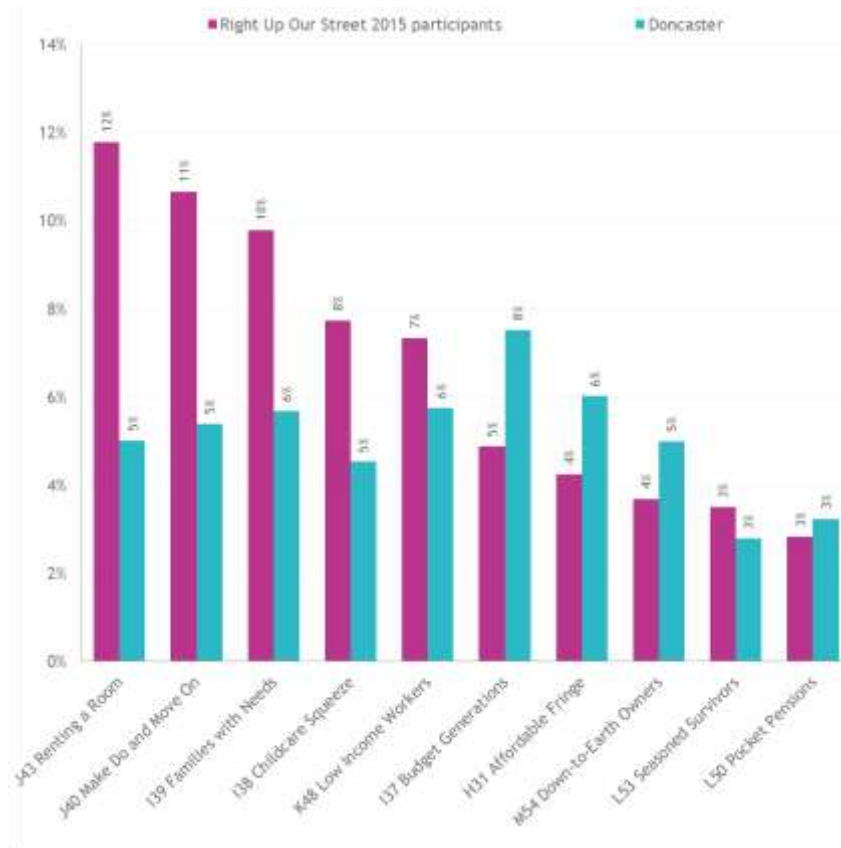
Combined, these produced nearly **2,500 opportunities to take part** in workshops and performances over the 3 years. However a key tension for RUOS was balancing the need to engage local audiences who were new to the arts, at the same time as achieving ambitious targets of total numbers taking part.

It is clear from the quantitative evidence collected, that RUOS was highly effective at engaging a local audience, with the postcode analysis conducted by the Audiences Agency<sup>1</sup> and activity reports produced for the Arts Council showing that **90% of audiences and 52% of commissioned artists came from Doncaster**. In addition RUOS audiences were not usual arts attenders, with the majority falling into audience segmentations associated with an interest in taking part in their local area or finding things to do with the family. The lowest numbers of audiences came from groups with a pre-existing interest in the arts.

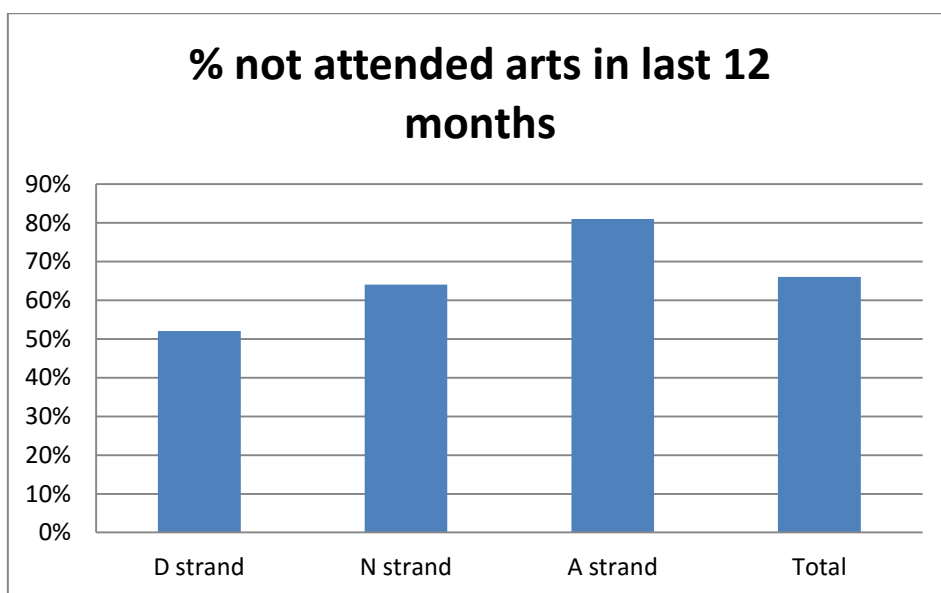


<sup>1</sup> fuller data available from RUOS on request

The Audience Agency’s findings also suggest that RUOS audiences come from hard pressed and low income categories. This is not only different to the profile of the arts attender nationally, where there is a clear correlation between engagement and higher socio-economic status, but RUOS also outperforms in relation to the percentage in these categories within Doncaster.



This provides clear evidence that RUOS achieved its aim of reaching those who are not normally engaged in the arts. This is further supported by RUOS audience surveys which show that the project doubled its original target, for at least a third of all audience to be new to the arts, with **two thirds reporting that they had not engaged in the arts in the previous 12 months**.



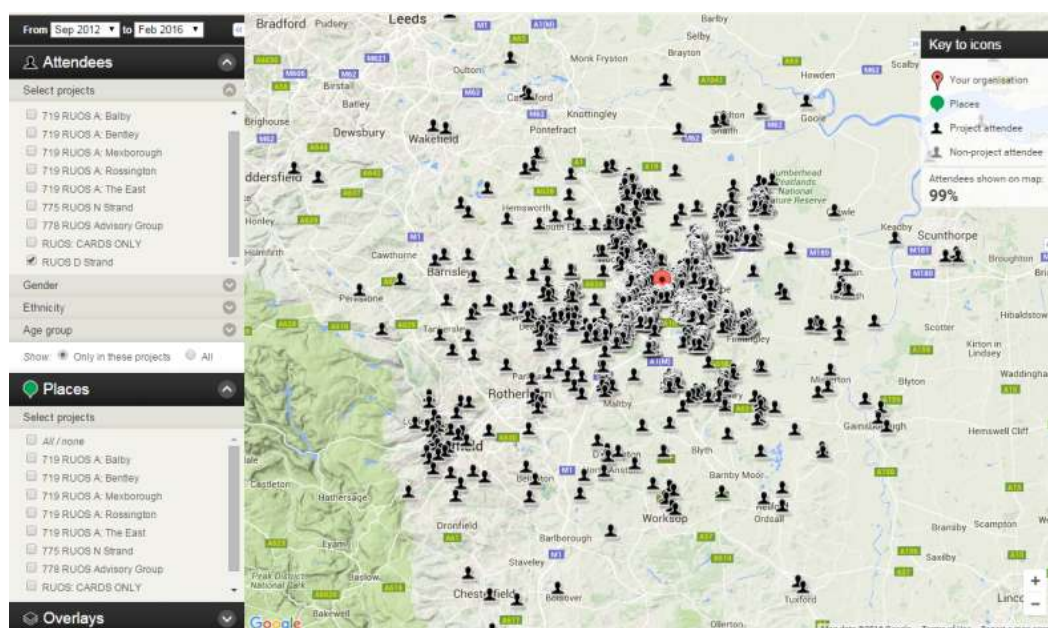
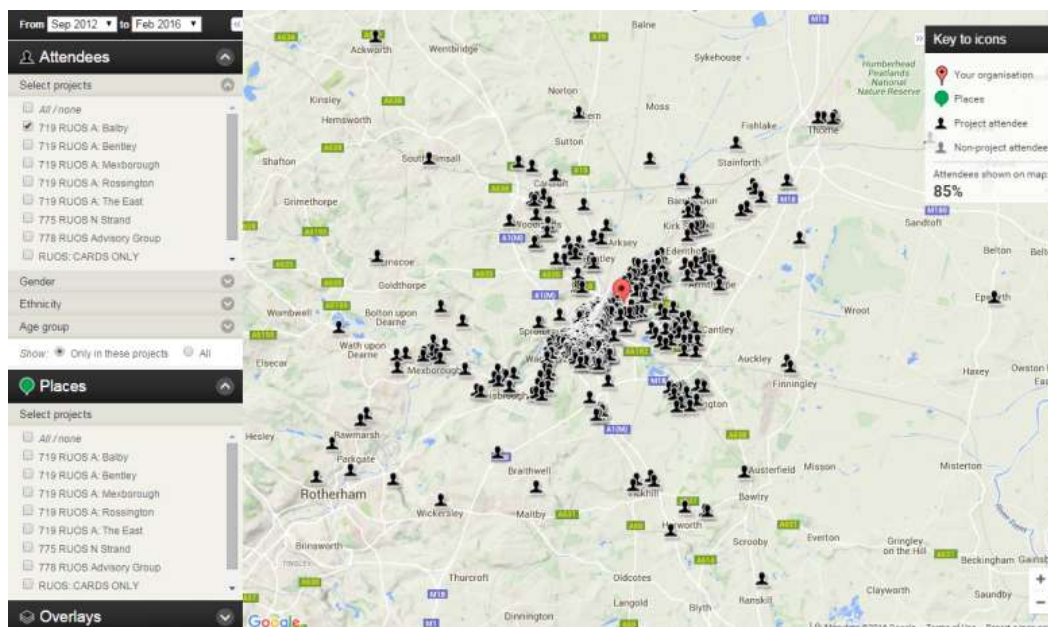
Combined this data clearly suggests that a key success of the programme was to get more people



to engage in the arts, rather than just the same people more often. Deeper analysis of the findings sought to examine whether different approaches achieved differently. There was less discrepancy than anticipated between work indoors and outside in the town centre. Cast's ticketed performances achieved 52% audiences new to the arts, while the free outdoor work of N Strand was only 55% (although the DNweekEND around the shopping centre did increase to 65%). Work at a hyper local level, in the designated five communities in contrast, was consistently more effective. Across all activities this attracted 80% new to the arts, with a similar level of consistency between indoor and outdoor activity.

**This suggests that price and crossing the threshold into a venue may not be the barrier to engagement anticipated but that accessibility and proximity may be more significant.**

Both qualitative data, reporting that people engaged because of an interest in their community, and maps showing hotspots of engagement, further support this theory as in both the local communities and the town centre there is a clear trend of people attending work near to their home base. Marketing analysis also identified that there was much better open rate of e-flyers with a local focus than ones with a district wide or art form focus. This proved helpful in targeting marketing for specific events but less helpful in trying to create crossovers between audiences.



These findings are supported by academic evidence to suggest a correlation between proximity, investment and engagement, not only in the arts but across all leisure services (Brook, 2013).

**This research therefore makes the case for ongoing and increased investment to create more local community based arts activities.**

A tension for RUOS was to achieve the successes above in terms of types of people engaged at the same time as achieving ambitious total target numbers. The table below provides a summary of the numbers recorded at all events<sup>2</sup>

<b>Individuals</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual registers</b>	<b>Actual headcount</b>	<b>Actual total</b>	<b>Variance</b>
D	11,397	1,936	12,046	13,982	123%
N	13,496	2,905	17,507	20,412	151%
A	20,093	4,661	10,717	15,378	77%
Total	44,985	9,502	40,271	49,773	111%
<b>Participations</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual registers</b>	<b>Actual headcount</b>	<b>Actual total</b>	<b>Variance</b>
D	27,647	2,056	12,793	14,849	54%
N	32,609	5,440	32,784	38,224	117%
A	48,442	13,307	24,718	38,025	78%
Total	108,698	20,803	70,295	91,098	84%

While the findings suggest that the total number of individuals taking part at events exceeded targets it is important to note that only 20% of data comes from register and box office information, with 80% being based on headcounts of numbers at events. As such the numbers of new individuals should be treated with some caution as it is impossible to accurately assess whether those participating had attended other events. The total number of participations in the range of RUOS activities and the percentages that were new to the arts therefore provide a more robust figure than the numbers of different individuals who engaged.

N Strand, over-achieved its target for total numbers engaged, by providing **a town centre arts festival which reached large numbers, showcased local artists and raised the profile of the arts across town**. The DNweekeND on its own accounted for nearly 50% of the total engagement in N strand. The programme aimed to both bring audiences into town especially for the event and to take art to the shopping areas where people would be anyway. Sample surveys suggest that this was an effective strategy as most people reported that they came upon the event by accident while feedback from local businesses demonstrate that it also increased footfall and spend in the town centre. Similarly the outdoor element of each production at Cast was credited with creating a perceptual shift in public response both to Cast as a new venue and to the arts in general, as demonstrated by change in local media coverage.

Although the total numbers of participations for D and A strand did not fully achieve targets it is worth noting that the original target for D strand included attendance at non RUOS events, as part of the theatre's regular programme. The aim was to demonstrate crossover from RUOS to Doncaster's mainstream arts infrastructure. But while anecdotal evidence from the theatre and gallery was that audiences did increase during the life of RUOS for town centre venues, no data was captured to evidence this. D strand's numbers therefore understate repeat engagement but this report is unable to determine by how much.

<sup>2</sup> Fuller data available from RUOS on request

In terms of A strand the data is more reliable. Despite some underachievement against targets, discussion throughout the programme demonstrated that building trust with those new to the arts took time. There was a strong feeling from the Arts Supporters that big one off events might increase the total numbers (and therefore reach targets) but that without involving the community beforehand this would not lead to sustainable engagement.

***“You could do an event in every part of [Doncaster] and you could theoretically hit every individual person once but where’s the legacy and sustainability of that? Or you could really build something that has the legacy and sustainability for a small amount of people that may be meaningful and have long term knock on effects”*** (Arts Supporter).

Evidence suggests that working in depth, over a longer period of time, secured long term engagement in the arts as **77% of individuals registered in the five communities repeated engagement with the programme**, with one audience member tallying over 100 participations. Significantly in terms of crossover to other strands twice as many attended N strand commissions in their own area than travelled to the town centre, which further supports the claims that people want arts activity delivered locally. In addition, working in depth also created approximately **200 community champions and increased their capacity and confidence to deliver arts activity across Doncaster** through:

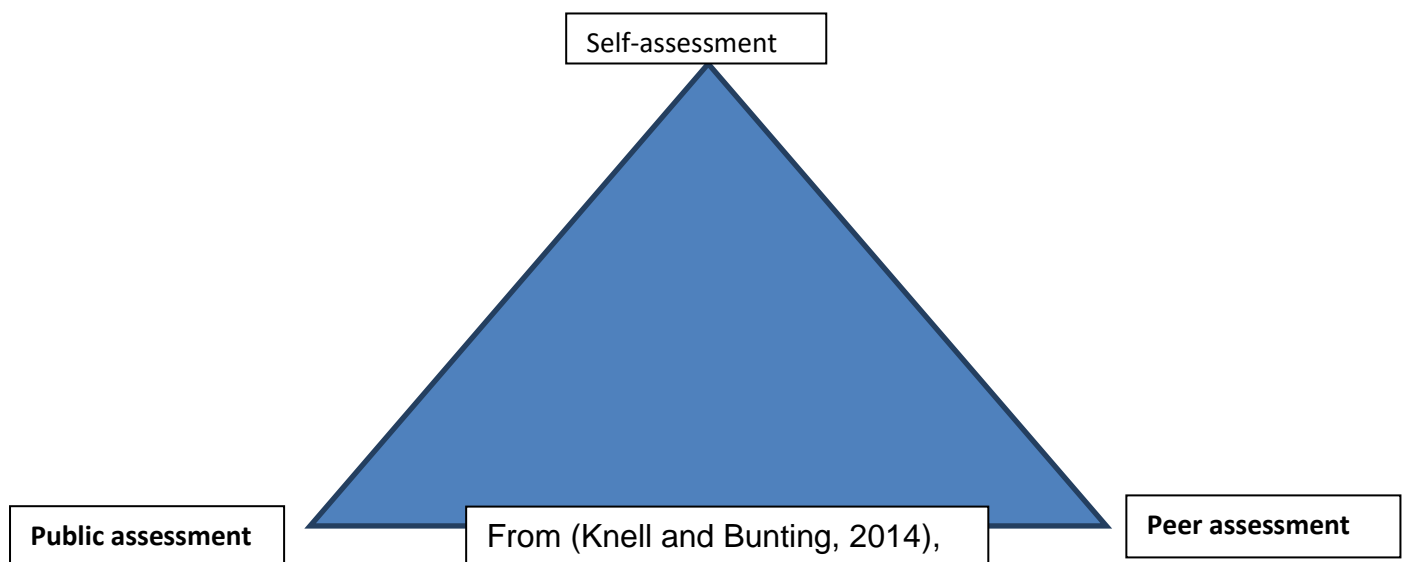
- **establishment of 4 community teams with around 10 members in each, commissioning work**
- **developing a pool of 110 volunteers actively supporting delivery**
- **providing opportunities for 50 amateurs to perform alongside professionals at Cast**
- **setting up 10 new amateur arts groups providing self-sustaining activity**
- **employing 9 paid interns being trained and now working in the arts**

The findings above suggest that RUOS was effective at getting more people to experience the arts. It did this by working in depth in community settings to engage those new to the arts, while also working in the town centre to raise the profile of the arts across Doncaster. RUOS also aimed to raise awareness of and interest in the wider arts sector through a marketing strategy that would create a “trusted friend” or “one stop shop” for information on all arts activities in Doncaster. This will be discussed in more detail under the key learning below but it is worth noting that it was in part delivered through development of a **website which had over 30,000 unique users** visiting the site. However, despite this showing that there was awareness of the site, the total number of sessions on the website was only 45,000 which suggest that only half of the people were returning to it after the first visit. Furthermore there is no evidence to demonstrate whether those visiting the website were from Doncaster or further afield. The programme also took over the Say Yes to Arts mailing list from the council, with the aim of developing a more extended mailing list of those in town with an interest in the arts. But while almost doubling in size from 2000 to 3500, this still represents only 1.17% of the population of the district.

Across the three years RUOS did capture evidence of **significantly improved local media coverage of the arts**, with a local radio arts programme and magazine being commissioned by RUOS, better and more regular good news stories in the local press and a regular RUOS editorial slot in the free press. The marketing team’s research found that it was this local press coverage that engaged a Doncaster audience, more than national press, but there were concerns that ***“assessment of quality or a successful programme won’t be whether someone in [Doncaster] liked it – it will be whether the [national media] cover it and that is a challenge if the programme is about increasing participation in Doncaster”*** (PR consultant). But not surprisingly, for a programme with a local focus, it proved hard to get national press attention. It is therefore vital that the assessment of quality and success in the programme engages a wide range of viewpoints.

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

It was clear throughout the programme that there were diverse opinions, not only on what was deemed excellent but on the very notion and value of such a judgement. While some participants and artists did not find the concept helpful as art was seen as **“about expression not being perfect”** and the aim was therefore to **“release the child not the judge”** others were more comfortable with the idea of assessing the quality of work or defining the qualities they thought made for good work. This report does not therefore attempt to use existing definitions of excellence but rather to allow these to be defined by the different voices heard for this research.



Public assessment was captured through community reviews, evaluations by the community teams and ad hoc feedback overheard and recorded. In addition a focus group was held with members from the community teams to directly ask them to talk about excellence in the programme. Peer assessment was captured through press coverage, Arts Council assessment reports, social media and through quarterly meetings where RUOS staff reflected on each other's practice. In addition focus groups were held with staff and a separate one with commissioned artists to explore excellence throughout the programme. Self-assessment was captured through reports written by staff and artists throughout the project.

It was significant in all the focus groups with staff, artists and audiences that the first examples of excellence cited equated with scale. Large, and particularly outdoor spectacle, clearly had the most immediate impact and for some “high impact = high quality”. However others expressed concern that while such events had the wow factor, they would probably not leave a legacy.

### **Colour of Time**

*Colour of Time was a one-day outdoor spectacular combined promenade theatre and dance in a procession through the Town Centre, and everyone agreed that the “scale of it was transformative”. But while Artonik, the creators of the piece, describe it as creating “a desire of tenderness, sharing and friendship, to fight against sectarian ideas or fear of the others”, most feedback from Doncaster suggested people saw it as entertaining but not challenging, fun but not original. It was therefore felt to provide an excellent experience that “got people talking about art” (Creative Producer). As such it was celebratory for those who participated and might raise artistic aspirations of the type of work that could come to Doncaster but it was lacking for many in terms of content.*

At the other end of the spectrum some people cited one to one experiences as examples of excellence. A poetry reading in a shed and a personal portrait drawing were both mentioned as examples of meaningful experiences. But such work created strong differences of opinion between those who **“really enjoyed the intimacy”** and those who **“just found that acutely embarrassing and uncomfortable”**. It was recognised by staff that there were clear differences between audiences who wanted to be engaged in the creative process and making and those who wanted to see work in exhibition or performance, without getting actively involved. This reinforced a sense that much opinion on quality was very individual and that it was more important to recognise that different audiences have different needs.

## **Cast**

*Many of the community participants loved the performances created for RUOS at **Cast** and there were good peer reviews via social media. The word “excellent” was used on numerous occasions: several people commented that the work had a local relevance that gave them a sense of pride that work of this quality was being created in their town. However peer reviews within RUOS staff team and national reviews were less enthusiastic. Several described the work as old fashioned and lacking in innovation, when compared with other work seen elsewhere. This difference of opinion cannot be merely related to the level of experience audiences have of theatre, as much of the positive social media came from other arts practitioners, but rather that there was a strong sense for many that excellence could not be assessed without an understanding of context as “what’s challenging [for some] might not be innovative [for others]”. Overall therefore many people felt happier talking about the “qualities” that make up an activity, rather than a singular notion of excellence.*

The qualities that most people said they looked for, whether professional artist or audience member, included the quality of the initial idea, the context the work was shown in, the framing or curation of the idea, the experience and the level of engagement for the audience, which all fall in line with nationally recognised quality guidelines (Blanche, 2014). Excellence therefore became associated with work that was **“more than the sum of its parts”** (Arts Supporter) and had a **“clear reason why it has happened in that place, in that particular media, for those people or that place”** (artist). Overall the RUOS team said they found a **“very small pool of artists who genuinely understand the concept of deep community engagement and high artistic quality”** (RUOS project lead), either locally or nationally. This was shown by the fact that in the artists’ focus group many described the intensive working with communities as a new concept because it was new to them: in the focus groups with community members and RUOS staff there was a sense that many of the artists commissioned needed to be challenged and to challenge themselves more to listen and respect, rather than thinking they had something to teach their audience.

**A key learning therefore is that there is need for capacity building not only among the audience but also within the professional arts sector.**

There was a sense from a range of viewpoints that the best practice existed where **“the artists acknowledge that the project would have been very different without the community involvement”** (Arts Supporter). This was demonstrated in relation to work across all strands. The community ensemble said that Cast **“treated every individual as special and it shines through everything they do”** (participant). This gave a local resonance to the work that was picked up by both local audiences and national newspapers. In N strand many of the artists engaged the community in the creative process, collecting stories or materials from them to shape into a finished art work that gave a **“real sense of people recognising themselves”** in the work. In A strand communities were involved in creating arts events, sometimes programming, often

creatively making and always helping shape. This process was seen as crucial to create high quality work that was bespoke to that community and that achieved high levels of engagement, as the community acted as advocates for the work within their communities. Such work also received the most positive feedback from participants on the quality of the experience itself. However there was also acknowledgement of the important role of the professional artist in **“providing something that they could not within the community”** (participant).

**Where too much control was given to the public, without some artistic overview, the quality of art was said to suffer and where too much was given to the artist, without community involvement the quality of engagement suffered.**

The process of a professional artist celebrating but elevating community ideas and wishes was seen by both artists and audience to strengthen, and not weaken, both the excellence of art and the excellence of engagement. This challenges perceptions of some in the arts sector that participatory processes may weaken the quality of art or reduce risk taking (Fennell et al., 2009, Jancovich, 2014).

### **Balby By The Sea**

*The community team devised a theme of the seaside for a summer event. Creative workshops were then run for months before the event, making items that fitted the theme of the day. The Arts Supporter used these both to market the event in advance and then as set and dressing to transform the open air site. Significantly it was commented on that there was a clear divide between the work presented outside, which was curated by the Arts Supporter and the organized activities housed inside the club itself, which were managed by the club alone. The value of using participatory activities as creative marketing to draw people in was key to the success of the day, but without the curation of the work by the artist it was felt it would not have come together into such a transformative event. Over 700 people were involved in the workshops leading up to the event and 800 attended on the day. It was also described as an artistic highlight of the three year programme not only by those involved but also through peer reviews.*

In other examples, where experienced artists with regional or national reputations were brought in to provide inspiration, they sometimes struggled to find this balance. With **Hand in Hand**, by Adept, the artists acknowledged that they gave too much control to the community without intervening and shaping the final product enough. As a result the work was said to have been good in parts but lacked “continuity of quality”. Despite an excellent track record, the **Handmade Parade** from Hebden Bridge did not work as effectively in the context of Doncaster. Feedback from participants was that their **“workshop strategy relied on confident participants, which might be fine for those already engaged in the arts but was not appropriate to engage those new to the arts who needed more support”**. As a result although the audience watching the parade saw a high quality output, those in the making workshops did not feel the same quality of engagement.

In the cases of two theatre companies **Excavate**, from out of town and **Rich Seam**, a national company based in Doncaster, the artists worked in depth in the communities to collect stories for productions. This was as an effective process to engage people, and find material that was relevant to the context. They also did a range of performative interventions as part of the first stage of the process, which engaged a large number of people but the dates and venues for the final show were not confirmed at this point which made it impossible for them to use these activities to draw people towards the performances. Once the stories were collected the artists took them away to create a performance, coming back with a finished piece and then trying to attract an audience afresh through more traditional marketing techniques. As a result both pieces were described as **“very high artistic quality, the piece was lovely and everyone who has**

***seen it loved it but the company did not sustain community engagement – so they didn't get audience***". (Arts Supporter).

The commissioned artists said they felt let down by RUOS for not offering enough support on the ground to help them maintain contacts, while the Arts Supporters said that without the artists being more visible it was not possible to sustain interest. Both acknowledged that repeat points of engagement, without the gap between process and product might be a more effective strategy to build audiences in future.

However not all projects required the same depth of engagement to have an impact. A range of pop up activities took place as part of RUOS which were seen as examples of excellence, precisely because of the nature of them as surprise encounters. ***Two Pints of Lager and a Piece of Contemporary Dance*** took contemporary dance into local pubs and bars in Doncaster, using the idea of 'flash-mobs' to surprise and intrigue unsuspecting audiences, so apart from asking permission from the venues to perform the artists did no pre-engagement. But significantly at each performance the artists and choreographer did engage by chatting to the surprised customers after the show and it was argued that ***"it wouldn't have worked if we just came up and did the show and left, neither for the audience nor the performers because the audience would just be like 'What? What just happened?' - You have to talk to them about it..."*** (Nina von der Werth) The show was selected through the community commissioning process and there was consensus among staff and participants that this contributed to the excellence of engagement. They gained feedback using beer mats, keeping in theme with the venues, and response to the work was excellent.

Involving local residents in the decision making process, not only to draw people in but also to push artists as well as audiences beyond their comfort zones was seen as essential. However it was noted that such processes are very time consuming, which caused a perception that RUOS was slow to develop its arts programme. While some argued that RUOS should therefore have put on more high impact inspiration programmes earlier, others argued that this would have weakened the decision making process. In some cases where participants were only involved at one stage in the process, responding to a pre-set agenda, or commissioning work but not following through into delivery, the engagement was deemed as less effective. Furthermore it was argued that ***"slowly growing equals strong roots...growing fast maybe you notice it and there's spectacle in there but actually its quite fragile and it isn't sustainable"*** (Arts Supporter).

This section has demonstrated how RUOS has assessed its achievements in terms of delivery of excellence of art and excellence of engagement. It has demonstrated the value of assessing the qualities that make up an experience, rather than a judgement on a singular notion of excellence, which include issues of concept, scale and context. It is clear that most work gained a variety of reactions and different audiences have different needs and expectations, but for RUOS excellence of art and excellence of engagement are seen as inextricably linked or as one person said ***"it really doesn't matter how good the quality is if no-one sees it"*** (participant). This was achieved where both the artist and the community felt they had something to contribute but also something to learn. While this takes time and careful facilitation, such care and attention is essential to not only provide excellence but sustainable practice.

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

The report so far has focused on assessing the programme as a whole in terms of achieving targets for size and make-up of attenders in RUOS activity and in relation to the qualities of the art and engagement in which they participated. Throughout this challenges and successes have been touched on. The following aims to summarise these with illustrative examples to draw together learning for the wider arts sector.

#### 3.1 What are the levers and barriers to increasing participation in Doncaster?

Early consultation meetings for RUOS identified a range of psychological barriers to the arts, which led to a lack of desire to engage with what was on offer, rather than just lack of opportunity. While cost and apathy were noted, more common responses related to a feeling that people wanted work to be delivered in more familiar surroundings, with more relevant content and they needed to be invited to take part by people they trusted. The programme therefore aimed to respond to and test these claims.

##### 3.1.1 Using the familiar to engage

The importance of familiarity was a recurring theme throughout the programme. This was seen by all parties as a pre-requisite for all arts attenders, whether new to the arts or not. This is supported by research which suggests that even most regular arts audiences engage in a narrow range of practices and have strong venue or art form loyalties (Jancovich, 2014). All the activities in RUOS therefore acknowledged the need to find a familiar hook to engage their audience.

Cast used familiar stories, with a northern resonance that had local relevance. They also involved local people to provide a familiar face on stage, in the form of a community ensemble, that people could relate to. The aim was to make what was at the start of the programme a new venue itself become a familiar space for the wider Doncaster community.

N strand commissions took work to familiar places, where people already visited, such as shopping centres and pubs, as well as spaces that created a curiosity to visit. **DNWeekeND** used the Mansion House and Adept used Cusworth and Brodsworth Hall, all heritage sites. Similarly **Day of the Dead** was staged in Hexthorpe Dell, a Victorian park which had a strong community history but had become under-used and Bentley pavilion, a recently renovated community hub (with Heritage Lottery funding) hosted Spiltmilk's VE Day. By putting activity in such places the work attracted audiences with a curiosity in seeing the building or park for the first time, as well as brought back visitors who knew the space but who were curious to see it animated afresh with activity. Commissioned artists also collected stories from local people, or created work within communities, to engage people in the creative process and make the artistic process and content feel more familiar.

A strand worked within existing community infrastructures, such as local libraries and working men's clubs, worked with everyday creative practices, such as upcycling and made arts activity a part of everyday life in the designated communities so that art itself became embedded practice in the community. This approach was believed by RUOS staff to have removed much of the fear of engagement and was credited as a large reason RUOS was able to engage those new to the arts.

There were some concerns expressed by artists that the use of the familiar needed to be carefully managed to avoid reliance on nostalgia or stereotyping. There were reports that some young people commented that **Glee Club** at Cast spoke too much to the older generations, who remembered the mining history of the town, but felt less relevant to them today, so for **Kes** Cast added the new element of the present day narrator to the play to enable contemporary relevance.



In A strand there were some differences of opinion between the Arts Supporters about using commercial popular film showings as a basis to bring people in, but Mexborough demonstrated the impact that such an approach can have by adding additional arts activities to surround the film showing thereby elevating the experience beyond artistic expectations.

### **Mexborough Outdoor Cinema**

*Cinema is arguably one of the most widely consumed and easily accessible art-forms available, so easily accessible that it is often not thought of as a form of art by the public, but rather solely as entertainment. The concept for the Outdoor Cinema event in Mexborough was to entice audiences by using the local community's well-known desire for a new cinema building, but to then provide attendees with new and exciting experiences once they arrived. The intrigue of staging activity outdoors in Hope Street (just off the town's main high street and market), also played a part in some audiences' decision to attend.*

*Performers dressed as characters from the film Paddington interacted with people on the street. Street dressing further added a vibrant, immersive atmosphere which created a welcoming and transformative experience. Once there people not only watched the film but with the help of a poet created a unique poem inspired by the day.*

*What could have easily become 'just a film showing', therefore became a creative, interactive, and performative day out – thereby elevating the attendees and raising their aspirations of what is possible to happen in their town.*

The marketing team acknowledged that sometimes the word art was itself a barrier to engagement, but finding other more familiar ways of describing work and making it an event often removed this problem. The Audience Agency data suggests that people are interested in taking part because they want something to do in the local area or with their families. To this end publicity often focused on having a day out, rather than the artistic content and findings suggest this increased engagement. This was witnessed in the receptiveness many artists said they found to their work from an audience who admitted they wouldn't have normally gone to see it but got involved because it was local and familiar, as one artist said **“one of the great things about [RUOS] was how open people were to us, they just took it all on board”** (artist).

### **Spiltmilk Dance**

*To celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V.E Day, Bentley Pavilion played host to Spiltmilk Dance. Their project used the familiar theme of V.E. Day and street parties to engage its audience, and though delivered by a contemporary dance company and featuring dance throughout the event; Spiltmilk decided against focusing on that in their marketing and promotion:*

*“When we spoke to groups and people about the event to promote it, we focused on the elements most relevant to them, rather than always mentioning we are a dance company and the artistic intention behind the event. Instead, we were able to put it very simply that we were throwing a community party, everyone's invited and then let them get creative once they were there!” Adele Wragg, Spiltmilk Dance*

*This proved to be incredibly successful as the event attracted over 750 members of the public, with ages ranging from 0-95. Once in the venue, attendees were exposed to professional, high quality contemporary dance in a non-threatening, familiar setting. This project also created new*

*relationships between the Bentley community and a local dance company – a relationship which, it is hoped, will lead the community to welcome other professional artists in the future.*

It was acknowledged that avoiding the use of the word art in marketing was challenging within a context where the programme wanted to raise awareness of the arts, but by using language that made people comfortable with the offer there was a strong sense that it “***gave artists and audiences the confidence to take risks and add an unusual twist to the familiar***” (Arts Supporter).

**The key learning therefore is that using the familiar to engage, whether in theme, context or communication style, does not need to limit artistic ambitions, and can have a significant impact on levels of engagement.**

### **3.1.2 Using active creative participation to build audiences for events**

From the outset RUOS acknowledged the creative participation that was already widespread in Doncaster, working alongside Doncaster Voluntary Arts Network (DVAN) as a member of the consortium. The programme involved creative participation at every stage including the community ensemble performing alongside professionals for all Cast’s commissioned productions; opportunities for voluntary arts groups to apply alongside professionals for N strand commissions and participatory activities throughout both N and A strand activities. These included:

- Opportunities for older people to take part in Glee Club, young people in Kes and anyone interested in movement to take part in Dance Hall
- Big Sing opportunity for local choirs to work with a professional composer
- No Fit State opportunity for local sports clubs to work with an established circus company
- Workshop activities in the 5 designated communities which has seen formation of 10 new voluntary arts groups in town
- Creative participation contributing to large scale installations and set dressings such as the Balby Poppy Project and Balby By The Sea, Hexthorpe’s Day of the Dead, and Rossington’s Quilt and Handmade Parade.

Despite this range of activity working with existing voluntary arts groups proved more of a challenge than anticipated. The DVAN consortium representative commented that some of RUOS’s communication tools about artists’ opportunities felt geared to professionals, but they also acknowledged apathy among voluntary arts groups. ***The Big Sing*** was set up to address this challenge. In response to interest from local choirs a professional composer was commissioned to create original work with them. While fifty individual choir members took part and were said to have valued the experience, the choirs themselves did not. Similarly at Cast, despite conceiving that the final show ***Dance Hall*** would be created with engagement from local dance groups they experienced similar resistance to collaboration. In the end engagement became limited to individual dance groups being given the opportunity to do a prelude of what they normally do before the show each night.

In both cases there was a feeling that many voluntary arts groups were content with what they did and who they engaged. Their resistance to change was seen as a key barrier to increasing the capacity of the voluntary arts sector in town, opening up opportunities for new members to participate in them and creating crossovers between activities.

However where the Arts Supporters worked long term in the designated communities there were notable exceptions to this. In Rossington the local choir were excited to explore opportunities through RUOS to push their own artistic practice. As a result the choir applied for a commission

through RUOS to work with international Beatboxer Jason Singh and this collaboration resulted in a newly commissioned **Song for Rossington** which has since been performed at several events around town. The community team also brought together the different arts activities in the community to create their own **Fun Palace**. In Mexborough a writer's group has not only formed but expanded and now operate independently from RUOS, running an annual **Ted Hughes Festival**. In Balby arts and craft workshops developed through RUOS have fed into events and also become a regular feature of library activities. The library has successfully applied for funding to have a freelance arts worker based there.

### **Rossington Fun Palace**

*In response to the national campaign motto of, 'Everyone an artist, everyone a scientist' Rossington community team developed an event providing a variety of arts and science activities, based on skills and talents of local people, including participants from RUOS workshop programmes such as Sew So Good and Get Sketchy.*

*Although the idea came from the community team they decided it should be project managed by the Arts Supporter because of the strong network and community connections they had developed. Together the Arts Supporter and the community team visited a Fun Palace in Manchester to get inspiration for how it should be done. This helped build the capacity of both the artist and the community team.*

*Although the event did not reach the ambitious target of 1000 people that were hoped would attend, the 500 who did attend stayed longer than expected, some staying all day and took part in multiple activities. Feedback from the community evaluation suggested that in reality a higher turnout would have been detrimental to the quality of the experience on the day and meant people stayed less time. There was a strong evidence that the event both engaged new people but also reenergized the regular workshop groups.*

*Peer review from other RUOS staff said that the combination of amateur and professional input, which the Arts Supporter decided on with the community team, was one of the key success factors. It raised the quality of the day from the Feast event that the community team had run the previous year which was entirely amateur activity.*

In total 10 new voluntary arts groups have formed during the life of RUOS. While it was acknowledged by staff that there were often clear distinctions between those who wanted to do creatively, those who wanted to plan activities and those who wanted to watch a final performance or exhibition, it was also felt that the greatest opportunities for crossover came from the intersections between these. **Those who take part in planning or creative activities are widely believed to be the best advocates for bringing new audiences to the arts.**

Creative participation was therefore widely used not just as an opportunity for those who wanted to take part in the creative process but also as a tool to build audiences for other events. Both the **Poppy Project** and **Balby By The Sea** were developed over the course of a whole year, with participants in each making work in craft workshops, schools, day centre and even sometimes at home. These were then incorporated into large scale art installations. In **Balby By The Sea** the Arts Supporter worked with 600 local participants over 7 months to decorate 1000 canvas bags and 36 giant ice dreams which were displayed in locations across the community to advertise their big summer event. In Rossington the Arts Supporter worked with local residents to collect personal stories and pictures of scars to reflect on the pain of war in commemoration of World War

1. Through workshops images were turned into patches for a **Rossington Village Quilt**, which was made by participants and has since toured across venues including Cast and Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery. In Bentley an artist engaged 600 local people in writing their wishes for the future which were then transformed into a permanent mural on a prominent gable end for the community.

### ***The Poppy Project***

*The Poppy Project was one of the first projects in RUOS which used a series of creative workshops to create a collective artwork for a community. In both formal and informal sessions participants were asked to design their own Poppy. Each one was then incorporated into an installation which was displayed in front of Balby Library.*

*The approach varied from session to session depending on the community group in question; in some instances the artist led the workshop herself and in others, where the group were more confident, they delivered the materials and let the group get on with it in their own way. But in all cases progress was carefully monitored to ensure consistent quality. Once the poppies were completed the artist designed a structure to incorporate them all. This resulted in an artwork which was “more than the sum of its parts” without the artist dictating or designing every aspect of it.*

*The poppies served to advertise the launch of Balby Unsung which began with a performance in the library of Only Water Between, from the professional company 56/96 which tells the story of a Balby family during WW1, through a series of letters discovered in a garage in Balby.*

*The project took an inter-generational approach working with whole families. Despite concerns from the community team that the piece would be vandalised if displayed outside the library this did not happen. Instead people reported a sense of it as a collective piece that has passed into community memory, even once it was taken down. This approach led to the front of the library becoming a more regular space for art installations, including an annual Christmas tree with community designed baubles, and an enormous Wish You Were Here postcard created as the publicity for Balby By The Sea. It was also seen to be what got the Library on the map as the place to do creative things. It has given the community a taste of getting involved with arts, and has shown them what can be done and created when they use their skills.*

Despite some resistance from the voluntary arts sector to do things in different ways therefore the Arts Supporters have demonstrated an appetite for new forms of creative engagement. It is significant that time and again the Arts Supporter argued that to maintain the motivation of people to take part in workshop activity it needed to feed into something bigger, in terms of an event or installation at the end.

**The key learning therefore is that at its best there is a symbiotic relationship between creative participation in a process and a final artistic output which elevates an individual’s contribution and where people can see and share their work.**

### **3.1.3 Developing RUOS as a trusted friend for the arts in Doncaster**

In addition to the arts activities offered through RUOS the aim was to become a recognised brand for arts activity in Doncaster, and remove barriers to engagement by becoming a trusted friend. This was to be achieved both through the marketing campaign mentioned above and through the visible presence of the RUOS team and, in particular, the Arts Supporters. Outputs include:

- website which had over 30,000 unique users visiting the site
- regular mail outs to mailing list of 3500 (5% of the population)
- Sine FM arts programme on community arts for 2 years
- Doncopolitan arts magazine
- monthly editorial in local free press
- regular and improved local media coverage
- five Arts Supporters in local arts bases

As stated above analysis of engagement with the website suggests that it has had over 30,000 unique visitors. In addition monthly information bulletins plus less regular but more targeted mail outs about specific activities were sent to a mailing list, albeit to a much smaller number of people (3,500). Combined there was clearly visibility for the programme. However evidence that there was a low return rate of visitors to the website and poor open rate of e-flyers suggests that while RUOS was able to gain interest it did not always maintain it.

The idea was that both the website and mailing list would provide information about all arts provision across the borough and create a “one stop shop for the arts”. In year one all groups listed on the council’s Say Yes to Arts database were asked to send in their activity to RUOS and keep it updated but only a small proportion did. Despite RUOS investing considerable time auditing professional and amateur arts activity in town this was never added to the website. Some people felt that as a result there was not enough content and that the website did not have enough interactive functionality to realise its ambition to become a trusted friend. In the focus groups one person from a pre-existing art group commented that they felt excluded by the lack of visibility for non RUOS activity, although they have since joined one of the community teams, to have more input into the programme.

Higher Rhythm also felt RUOS concentrated too much on their own activity. They were commissioned to develop *Right on Our Radio*, on Sine FM to contribute to the trusted friend brand but it struggled to create a consistent quality product. The radio station said that RUOS compromised the quality of the show by insisting that all the content was about their own activities, and then not making enough content available to make an interesting show. However staff at RUOS disputed these claims and argued that there were opportunities for people to profile work that was not part of RUOS but they did not take the initiative to do so. Others also argued that it was the radio show itself which didn’t have the quality to engage its listeners. In either event as the third Arts Council NPO in Doncaster, with a community radio brief, it seems to be a missed opportunity to not find a way to develop a high quality arts programme for the town.

*Doncopolitan*, the new arts magazine commissioned by RUOS, demonstrated an appetite for arts content in the media. Many of the staff on RUOS believed it had done this really well and anecdotally said that it appeared to be read by a wide range of people. But there were some concerns from an early focus group for the magazine that the aesthetics of the magazines could deter those unengaged in the arts; and that perhaps the target audience leaned too heavily towards existing arts consumers in Doncaster. This was also reiterated by some members of the RUOS consortium in the early days who felt that while it was effective at giving a voice to the arts community it missed the opportunity to reinvent how the arts speak to the unengaged, which was the overarching aim of RUOS. However although it required investment from RUOS to kick start it, it continues to develop its readership and has built a model, based on advertising which it is hoped will make it sustainable longer term, thus providing an ongoing opportunity to raise the profile of the arts in Doncaster.

In terms of overall marketing strategy for the programme, one of the challenges was said to be pressures over reaching targets of engagement in activity. It was felt that this may have created a

defensive rather than collaborative relationship both between strands within RUOS and between RUOS and the wider arts infrastructure. This led to a more focused marketing approach on individual RUOS activity than initially planned, with a range of effective and creative marketing tools used to market events (e.g. dressed up characters in streets, branded bags, pop-up events). As a result **“the plus thing was that it meant that everything was very bespoke, the negative side is that it hasn’t created the trusted brand for the arts in Doncaster which was talked about in the plan”**. (Marketing)

Some of the marketing team supported this shift as they found that personal contacts and a hyper local focus were the most effective ways of reaching those not already engaged in the arts. While the one stop shop for the arts across Doncaster has therefore not been achieved, locally based activity marketing and the street presence of the Arts Supporters and community teams have created visible champions for the arts in the designated communities.

Both D and N strand said that at their best Arts Supporters opened doors to the wider arts sector. Some of the commissioned artists credited the Arts Supporters as **“crucial really and we worked very differently in the areas because of the way they worked”**. Where they were trusted so were the arts activities and where they were less visible the audiences were either not there or less engaged. But one of the challenges of this approach was that much of the visibility created by the Arts Supporters was of themselves as individuals, using their own contacts and social media pages, rather than building the RUOS brand.

### ***The Role of the Arts Supporters***

*For the general public it can at times be difficult to put trust in groups and organisations, and even more-so into a ‘brand’ especially with no prior knowledge of the ethos or projects. The role of the Arts Supporters was to be the ‘face’ of RUOS in the individual communities and to be a sounding board for comments, queries and concerns. By having individuals active within a community, who are physically present and who the public can engage with, has been incredibly effective for building engagement in the RUOS project but although the Arts Supporters promoted the RUOS brand and programme as a whole, it became apparent that the public linked the delivered events with the Arts Supporter more than with the RUOS brand:*

*“I was helping with a survey in Mexborough asking people in the streets if they knew anything about the arts in Mexborough and everyone I spoke to had the same answer ‘No I don’t know’ - then I asked ‘Do you know Dom?’ and they’d say ‘Yeah, he’s that daft lad who wants to do this or that’ - so they all knew Dom and his activities!” Helen McCabe, MexCraft, on Mexborough Arts Supporter Dominic Somers*

*Though situating Arts Supporters seems to have been the most effective approach to securing and building engagement from community members, rather than creating a trusted brand it has instead created trusted individuals. A key challenge for the sustainability of the programme therefore is to consider how the trusted relationships formed can be translated into trust for RUOS as a brand or the arts in general.*

The very strength of the visibility of the Arts Supporters brought its own challenges not only in terms of legacy for the brand, but also in terms of creating pathways to other activities during the programme. Some artists accused the Arts Supporters of sometimes acting as gatekeepers, limiting their access to communities unless the project was of interest to them. But the Arts Supporters also said that they did not see it as their role to facilitate other artists’ work and one criticised the fact that it sometimes felt like they were **“just treated like a flyer agency”** for the regular arts programme. All felt that they did not have the capacity to promote crossover activity,

while they were active in delivery themselves. This therefore demonstrates the benefits and limitations of a marketing approach based around individual trusted friends, rather than building a brand. But it equally demonstrates the value of embedding Arts Supporters in communities to create activity locally.

**The key learning therefore is that while individuals can build trust in the arts a more strategic approach is needed to embed such practices across the wider arts sector.**

### 3.1.4 Working in breadth and working at depth

RUOS was faced with a challenge throughout the programme of trying to engage large numbers of people from across Doncaster, reach a significant proportion that were new to the arts and ensure that participation was not just one off but sustained. Reaching large numbers was seen to be about creating opportunities for participation to people across the whole district, while working in depth, with small numbers of people, was seen as needing to build local capacity that could support sustainability of activities and create advocates for the arts in their communities – close to home. As a result across the full range of activities

- Over 100,000 participations were recorded over the life of the project
- 2/3 of the audience surveyed said they had not engaged in the arts in the last 12 months
- 77% of those registering reappeared on lists as repeat attenders
- 200 people were actively involved in decision making or volunteering on the programme

In the original business plan the work at Cast was seen to combine strategies. Working in depth with a small number of people who formed the community ensemble, the aim was both to build their capacity and to be a sounding board for the venue's development. At the same time working in breadth by offering work at a venue in the town centre, aimed to reach out across the district and raise the profile of the arts in Doncaster. Cast achieved only 54% of their target numbers for working at breadth of which a similar percentage were new to the arts. Significantly numbers were lower in year three than in the previous two years. While, as explained above, this is in part a feature of the way data was collected, not taking account of repeat engagement in Cast's core programme, and the nature of the production in year three, which was the first not based on a familiar title, it also demonstrates the challenge of building audiences for a new venue with traditional theatre productions.

The work with the community ensemble also fluctuated with, not surprisingly, smaller numbers volunteering in year one, and larger numbers in year two, but significantly numbers also dropped in year 3. Again while this may be explained in relation to the movement focus for ***Dance Hall*** in year 3, it does still demonstrate a failure to take participants on a journey. The staff at Cast acknowledged that they did not have the capacity to maintain the enthusiasm developed in the annual productions across the year and therefore missed opportunities to build a sustainable relationship with community advocates. **This demonstrates the importance of long term engagement strategies, rather than short term project based initiatives.**

To supplement the work within Cast the venue also commissioned Slung Low's ***Cast of Thousands*** at the beginning of the programme and Artonik's ***Colour of Time*** towards the end. These provided outdoor free activity with the aim of reaching a mass audience, who might be resistant to crossing the threshold into a theatre. But significantly there is no evidence that this work attracted larger audiences than local community events. ***Colour of Time***, attracted about 1000 people, close in numbers as some local initiatives such as ***Balby By The Sea***. Both were equally praised for their quality of experience. It was however recognised that ***Colour of Time*** was a more effective mechanism to raise the profile of the arts across the district and challenge

perceptions of what it is possible to do in Doncaster. It was often the first thing people remembered when asked about their best experience in RUOS and it received positive media attention. But ***Balby By The Sea*** also demonstrated a greater ability to attract those new to the arts and to sustain their interest, with evidence of cross over between participants making materials to be part of the event and attending the event, and then in turn going to see other activities in the programme.

In Rossington bringing in the ***Handmade Parade*** to work with local people also attracted similar numbers to the locally produced ***Fun Palace***. But although there were some criticisms of the parade team's engagement with those new to the arts, assuming a level of skills and confidence in workshop activity that did not always exist, the Rossington Community Team felt working with such artists did help them raise their game and they have commissioned them to work on a new parade next year.

**This does seem to suggest that high profile arts companies do not guarantee to bring breadth of engagement any more than locally produced work but they may still play a vital role in raising artistic profile and ambitions.**

The only activity to attract a significantly larger audience was the three day long ***DNweekeND***, which balanced professional and amateur work and local work and work from outside of town. While some saw its variety as its strength, in offering "something for everyone" others felt this diffused the quality of the experience. However attracting approximately 4000 people each year, of which approximately 65% were also new to the arts, it was claimed to have not only increased participation in the arts but also created civic pride, with most people surveyed saying they would encourage others to attend next year. It also made an economic contribution to the retail outlets in the town centre, which may provide an opportunity for making it a more sustainable event, through local sponsorship. Quality and focus it was believed could be developed year on year and a focus on improving quality should not become a barrier to trying new things.

An events based approach was therefore seen to have had some success in reaching large numbers and challenging perceptions of the arts, but it provided challenges in building repeated and sustained engagement or gaining understanding of the barriers people faced engaging in the arts. For the Arts Supporters in particular there was agreement that ***"I don't care if 100,000 people turned up if they're already engaged but I do care if you get half a dozen and they've never engaged before and as a result they go on to engage more"*** (Arts Supporter).

Working in depth was demonstrated to be effective by the fact that work in the designated communities attracted by far the largest percentage of audiences who were new to the arts, at an average of 80%. Equally significantly 77% of these went on to engage in other arts activities, although they were twice as likely to still do this locally, rather than to travel into town. While there were examples of people who had wanted to be involved in the arts all their lives but had not previously had the opportunity until RUOS came along, more often participation was linked to the desire to participate in the community more than a desire to participate in the arts per se. **This demonstrates a challenge within all work on arts participation, whether the aim is to provide opportunities for people to be more active citizens or whether it is to drive audiences to the existing arts infrastructure.**

The depth work in the five communities involved a range of activities from one off taster sessions to give people a chance to try something new, to the formation of new local groups where people could participate long term, as well as opportunities to take part creatively or be involved in planning and delivery of activities. While the total numbers of people engaged in such processes might be in the hundreds rather than thousands it was shown that working with small groups, not only developed their interests and skills but they in turn became advocates for the arts, sharing



their experiences with larger audiences. In Rossington while relatively small numbers were involved in making the community quilt, it has reached a much larger audience through word of mouth from those who took part. Similarly the upcycling group in Balby, while having no more than about a dozen members, inspired ideas for many of the larger activities in the area, including the Poppies installation outside the library. In Mexborough the creation of a local writers group which initially attracted similar numbers has now led to the development of an annual Ted Hughes festival which attracts artists and audiences both from within the town and nationally, and this year was successful in gaining independent Arts Council funding through Grants for the Arts.

Working in depth has also taken place through development of the community teams in the designated communities. While the teams only involve up to 15 people in each area, they have played a significant role in decision making on the local cultural offer. All the staff involved at RUOS expressed surprise at the level of commitment community team members gave once engaged, where they had a say in commissioning work for their community. This is said to have helped change the mind-sets of both the artists working in these areas and the community participants. But it was clear from the very different approaches taken in each area that different approaches were needed, both to respond to the specifics of different communities, but also the skills of the Arts Supporters.

In Bentley the strength of existing community associations created gatekeepers who presented barriers for the Arts Supporter in reaching the wider community, and therefore it was decided to approach individuals rather than networks, while in the East the pub network initially proved a useful existing structure to work from to create a series of Open Mic nights that moved beyond the traditional model by presenting cross art form work. Similarly while the Arts Supporter in Mexborough had a theatre background and this perhaps influenced a more text based approach, with cinema, poetry and theatre as the mainstay of the programme, the Balby Arts Supporter's visual arts background influenced the programme there, which led more towards installations.

A challenge therefore is to ensure that while the programme should be developed in a bespoke manner, responding both to the community and the artists' interests and skills, care is required to ensure that this does not create new barriers for people with other interests. Arts Supporters tried to address this by trying to work collaboratively with each other – which had limited success due to time constraints and actively encouraging refreshment within their community teams, allowing new members to join at any stage, and bring in fresh ideas. But it was also acknowledged that some consistency was needed to get things done.

Working in depth with smaller numbers, was seen as essential to reach those who presented the greatest barriers to engaging in the arts but it did mean that overall both the total numbers of participations in A strand and the target numbers for people involved in the community teams was lower than projected. Many felt that this was because removing the barriers to participation is more time consuming and intensive than anyone anticipated. This clearly creates a tension within a programme that has high targets for overall numbers.

**The key learning therefore is that while creating work for large numbers is important to raise the profile of the arts, work in depth with smaller numbers is more effective at removing the barriers to engagement. A key challenge for the Arts Council therefore is to recognise that value for money cannot only be measured in pound per head spent, but should take account of the transformational impact on individuals.**

### **3.2** How does the choice of space and context within which the work is shown influence who takes part?

The RUOS approach of creating three strands of work each with its own strategy aimed to explore the barriers to arts engagement by testing different approaches, both across the three strands and within each. In order to specifically examine how different activities and processes had different outcomes work took place in traditional arts venues, non-arts venues, community infrastructure buildings and outdoors in order to test the relationship between space and context and the audiences engaged. The learning from these approaches are explored below.

### 3.2.1 Governance and Doncaster's core arts infrastructure

During the life of RUOS, in addition to the range of independent artists based in Doncaster, the Arts Council were regularly funding 3 organisations in Doncaster, as part of their national portfolio; Cast, darts and Higher Rhythm. In addition the local authority supported the Museum and Art Gallery and Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust (DCLT) also managed a range of leisure facilities across the district. The voluntary arts sector was networked through DVAN (Doncaster Voluntary Arts Network). This core infrastructure all had some involvement in RUOS. Cast, darts, DCLT and DVAN were all members of the Consortium which oversaw the programme, were partners in delivery and the final decision making body.

A decision was made at the business planning stage not to appoint a Creative Director to work across the programme. It was felt by the Consortium that the artistic vision could best be delivered through the three strands working independently, testing very different approaches and incorporating community decisions on an ongoing basis. Two of the strands were overseen by creative leads within the host organisations (the directors of Cast and darts) and a Creative Producer was employed to deliver the third and potentially make links between strands. This structure was seen to have worked effectively on an operational level, managing staff and budgets, and delivering outputs. But at the end of year one a number of people commented that RUOS as a whole lacked creative leadership and vision. The 3 strands were also said to be acting competitively rather than collaboratively. To address this in year two the Chief Executive of DCLT, as a non-delivery organization, was seconded to pick up overall organisational leadership and a creative team was formed, with the intention that the artistic leads for each strand would meet regularly to collaborate and encourage greater crossover.

In practice meetings of this group were not prioritised, particularly by Cast, who repeatedly failed to attend. This was in part seen as a capacity issue. Cast had the pressure of running a new venue of which RUOS activity was just one part, and the other strands had the pressure of delivering ambitious targets within a tight timeframe. But it was also acknowledged that not only the strands but different members of the Consortium had different attitudes and approaches both in relation to what they defined as high quality art and the role they saw for community decision making. While it was felt that there was increased respect between organisations and strands by the end of the three years, one person described the governance as; ***“organisations coming together because there is money to be brought into the town as opposed to having a desire to work together in the first place”*** (Consortium member), which was the real barrier to creating a shared vision.

The Museum and Art Gallery and Higher Rhythm were not on the Consortium but were represented on a separate advisory committee, which included community members. This group was less formal with no governance responsibilities and no decision making powers. Although active inputting ideas in the early development stages of the project it did not continue meeting once the community teams were set up by the Arts Supporters. Some felt that this limited RUOS's ability to create effective consultative decision making in the way envisaged in the plan as the role of the community teams was restricted to programming for their local areas and consultation on N commissions, rather than decision making at a project level.

Despite the limitations of this, the governance structure did allow money to be distributed, with some community involvement in decision making, and with activity taking place in all the facilities across town.

- darts were lead partner, host to A and D strand and base for Consortium and consultation meetings
- Cast presented 3 productions in their main auditorium
- Higher Rhythm developed Right on Our Radio, arts radio programme and Music Bomb, a programme of artists' development for local bands
- DMBC buildings, including the Mansion House, The Museum and Art Gallery were used for N commissions

There were also some crossover activities between organisations and strands. Cast hosted Higher Rhythm's showcase of artists from **Music Bomb**, collaborated with N on a programme of New Writing, hosted The Friday Hang Out - joint D and N strand networking activities for artists, and a Phase 1 exhibition of work produced by all strands. A strand supported artists from Cast and N commissions introducing them and the work into their communities. All the venues in town also said they experienced increased footfall during the life of RUOS, which they attributed to the programme, although it is hard to prove this correlation based on the evidence captured.

From the findings in the quantitative data discussed above, the greatest crossover was within the designated community areas rather than between strands and between the centre and the periphery. Several people interviewed felt that while the three strands approach was useful in testing different propositions it also became a barrier for creating pathways for audiences. In the artist's focus group there was a feeling that **"I don't think RUOS has done enough or anything to foster opportunities [for crossover] – I think it has been up to individuals"**. (artist) One person argued this was part of long standing **"institutional issues [in Doncaster], it is the culture of we all do it in our own way"** (Consortium member) which in turn also limited the ability to share learning from RUOS.

**This hits at the heart of one of the key challenges for RUOS; how to support communities in defining the local cultural offer (which might challenge the current infrastructure) at the same time as both engaging with and being delivered by this core infrastructure – and how to ensure that RUOS is not a short term project but has left a lasting legacy.**

Although the aspiration of the funding was for long term change in arts engagement, the short term nature of the funding led to it being treated as a project, with the activity being led by the core arts infrastructure, including 2 Arts Council NPOs but remaining separate to their core business. The Arts Supporters sat outside darts' Core Team, as did the Creative Producer role and Cast's 3 shows were additional to and different from their main programme. All operated very differently from the host organization and therefore limited the potential for learning to be embedded. Significantly in interview all 3 of the Arts Council NPOs also said that RUOS had not changed their normal practices.

It was also clear both from observation at Consortium meetings and throughout the interviews that the different ethos operating among Consortium members and between different strands hindered shared learning. An example of this is demonstrated by the criticism from D strand and some N commissioned artists that RUOS became too much about promoting itself as a separate activity and not enough about audience development for the core infrastructure, while the Arts Supporters criticised the core infrastructure for not being open to learning new ways of working and relying on approaches which had failed to engage audiences to date.

A key challenge for RUOS therefore remains how the learning from the action research project is embedded in the core arts infrastructure. Equally important is to acknowledge that if A strand was

**“more and more embedded into the communities that they are working in”** (Consortium member) and effective at reaching those new to the arts, as the data suggests, then this work should be valued on its own merits, not seen as audience development for town centre activity or venues. This however requires the continuation of both investment and activity in RUOS at a local level as **“without that resource what can we bring in that is going to be unique for Doncaster or have Doncaster voice?”** (Cast staff member).

**A key learning therefore is that consortium working provides both opportunities to test different approaches but also brings challenges where there is not agreement over the core ethos of the programme. RUOS demonstrated the integrity of work delivered at a local level for its own sake, not just as audience development for the existing infrastructure - and this remains a challenge to sustain without ongoing financial support.**

### **3.2.2 Surprise encounters in non-traditional venues**

The data on who took part in RUOS activities clearly shows that taking work to where people are is the most effective tool for engaging those new to the arts. Whether this was through local community activities in A strand or staging work around the shopping centres with DNweekeND, creating pop up events and surprise encounters that people found themselves at, rather than made the decision to attend, was seen as a key tool to break down barriers to the arts. The context therefore was seen as more significant than whether the work was inside a venue or outside. This led to a number of activities including:

- Open Mic nights in pubs, introducing people to a wider range of art forms than usual
- A script reading at a firework display
- Drawing and craft sessions and a small exhibition in a local café
- Storytelling and sharing in a hairdressers
- Contemporary dance in pubs
- Events in working men’s clubs
- A literature festival in Ted Hughes’ old school
- A Fun Palace in a community/enterprise centre
- The Art Car and Art Shed being built to pop up arts activity at pre-existing community events
- Theatre performance at a food bank
- Celebratory events in parks

The essence of this approach was to deliver short, yet exciting work directly to the public in settings which were comfortable and familiar to them. In the case of the Open Mic nights, this allowed a variety of artists and art forms to be showcased. In some cases the performances engaged those who would have been drinking in the pub or club anyway and in others it brought in a new audience. Either way it introduced people to tasters of work they wouldn’t otherwise see. Similarly it introduced the arts into places which would not normally be considered arts venues. Many of the pubs who held Open Mic nights have come back to RUOS and asked for more activity to be based with them. As a result pop up events have opened up a venue circuit and a willing audience has been developed for more challenging work.

#### ***Two pints of Lager and a Piece of Contemporary Dance***

*This was an N-Strand commission by London-based artist Nina von der Werth that toured a short contemporary dance piece around local pubs and bars throughout the Doncaster borough, using the idea of ‘flash-mobs’ to surprise and intrigue unsuspecting audiences.*

*‘Nina brought a very unique idea to the table; one that the community commissioning team felt had*

*the potential to produce a strong public reaction, a powerful impact and a lasting creative legacy. It didn't disappoint' Creative Producer*

*With pop-up events the desired effect is often one of surprise or unpredictability, so the artists created the show in London and apart from asking permission from the venues to perform did no pre-engagement. But one of the pitfalls of staging pop-up events in non-traditional venues is the difficulty in securing follow-up and creating a sustainable recurring audience. If after a pop-up activity audiences are left unable to find more information, the experience becomes nothing more than a one-off novelty, and not something that allows the building of engagement and sustainability. By staying behind after the show to talk to customers it was clear that the work was very well received but the artist expressed concern about how this enthusiasm would be sustained, as they had no mechanism to inform the audience of other opportunities.*

*While the Creative Producer is working with the pubs to look at future opportunities to use them as venues for future work in Phase 2 more consideration is needed to build crossovers for audiences at pop-up events*

It was recognised that surprise encounters could alienate as easily as they could engage. Some participants commented that they felt intimidated by too intimate encounters with artists, where they had not chosen to engage. It was recognised therefore that respect is needed when taking work to people who have not chosen to take part. It was also felt important that artists did not take the work too seriously. A sense of humour or quirkiness were words commonly used to describe what people liked in pop up activities and this was believed to be a key feature in removing the sense of alienation. Projects such as **Mexborough open air cinema** created this sense of fun by having community team members dressed as characters from the films being shown – and interacting in creative ways - and the flash mob approach described above used commercial advertising to create a quirky event. In both cases the artists felt that putting the piece on stage or in a cinema would have elicited a different audience and a more reserved response. However by presenting a piece in a surprising way allowed the work to be challenging and still be received in an accessible and non-threatening way. This was demonstrated by the fact that feedback from such work was said to be very positive.

Another pop up strategy RUOS used was to create temporary touring arts spaces that could appear anywhere but would create awareness of the programme, building familiarity through repeat visits. These were seen as a particularly useful tool in areas where there was not a dedicated Arts Supporter or community team. In Bentley after the failure to create a team and the departure of the Arts Supporter at the end of year one RUOS commissioned an artist to create two Art Sheds, to give RUOS and the arts visibility at community activities that might be happening anyway but that had not previously had an arts input.

### ***The Art Sheds***

*Artist, Dan Jones, was commissioned by RUOS to create a mobile arts space from which creative activities could both be presented and delivered. Dan designed and built two mobile sheds that could be decorated depending on the theme of the event, therefore allowing them to be completely transferable/transformable. Dan's work with sheds was initially planned as a commission for Bentley as an experimental alternative to having a permanent Arts Base, as were being established by Arts Supporters in other areas. They therefore became known as The Bentley Sheds and delivered 15 activities within Bentley itself, engaging around 570 participants. However demand has been such that they have popped up at numerous RUOS events outside of Bentley as well, such as Balby By The Sea, Rossington Fun Palace, and DNweekeND.*

*Repeated use of them has created a sense of ownership locally in Bentley, which meant that at the end of Phase 1 there were community members ready to take on responsibility for keeping them in the area.*

However this was not only seen as an effective tool where there was not an Arts Supporter. In Mexborough an Art Car was also purchased and decorated for the delivery of a yearlong ceramics project. This became a familiar sight at a variety of locations, including repeat appearances at the weekly market. But some people questioned whether the audience at pop up events perceived themselves to be taking part in an arts experience. While this was not seen to affect the quality of the experience itself, it was seen as a hindrance at being able to claim repeat engagement from such activities. It was acknowledged by artists and venues alike that it was important to have a plan beyond the initial surprise encounter so that such opportunities provide pathways for audiences to other arts activity to sustain engagement.

In Mexborough an Art Giveaway involved the Arts Supporter creating quick interesting canvas pieces of graffiti art. He then spent chunks of time in the centre of Mexborough, giving them away in return for a conversation about the arts and people signing up to the RUOS mailing list. This was also repeated at the Ted Hughes Festival when large numbers of beautifully produced booklets of poetry were given away. The aim through both giftings was that the Arts Supporter gained greater understanding of his community through the conversation and the participant was provided access to information about further activities that might interest them, through the mailing list. The artworks received were of sufficient quality to be valued for themselves. This also provided a mechanism to track repeat engagement. The concept of the giveaway was developed even further with the development of the Mexborough Manifesto which was printed onto thousands of canvas shopping bags and given away. They became highly sort after objects.

**The key learning is that pop up events are an effective mechanism to reach people new to the arts and develop a community venue but work must be built into the process to provide pathways to create repeat engagement.**

### **3.2.3 New community arts infrastructure**

Over the three years of Phase 1 of RUOS the Arts Supporters worked with a range of community spaces from community centres and libraries to working men's clubs, pubs and cafes. In addition N Strand worked with non-arts venues in the town centre. The aim was to reach different people through different mechanisms, at the same time as embedding the idea of including arts practice in non-arts spaces. At its best this practice had benefits for both increasing arts participation, engaging people who would not cross the threshold into an arts venue, at the same time as regenerating a local infrastructure by providing activities that raised the profile and use of community resources. The spaces that were developed include:

- Balby Library – a community asset transfer whose footfall increased by up to 60% through hosting arts activities
- Woodfield Club – a working men's bar and club which is now a venue for performances and gigs, including a regular Open Mic night
- Concertina Club – a working men's club now host to a regular cinema night, the Pitmen Poets and also offers rehearsal and performance space to local companies
- No 30 Shop in Mexborough
- Market Café, Rossington – which runs workshops and hosts exhibitions
- Holmescarr Community Centre, Rossington – which runs regular arts and craft activity and has developed its own Fun Palace through RUOS

- Mansion House – a heritage venue who are working with RUOS to develop an arts programme
- Frenchgate and Waterdale shopping centres – who are now commissioning arts for their public spaces
- Town centre pubs who are wanting to programme arts

The initial plan for A Strand was that the Arts Supporters would each be based in a community space in their five communities and over the course of the three years would develop that space into a community arts hub, which would create a sustainable model for the arts in the different communities. However it quickly became apparent that there were different needs in different areas. In Balby for example the Arts Supporter found the library a great starting point to access members of the community and start a conversation about what people would like to see happening in their area. But in Bentley in contrast the library committee were resistant at first. A pop up approach therefore worked better at inspiring the library to come on board – and it became the focus for very specific activity –such as The Bentley Chair.

While some Arts Supporters developed the arts base model more than others, all found that there were pros and cons with any permanent space. Being limited to one space limited the people they engaged with rather than enhancing it. At the same time it was recognised that people needed a place to go that they felt a connection to, both to create a sense of ownership in the activity and as a focal point to disseminate information about what was going on. In Rossington the initial idea for an arts base was the Holmescarr Centre, but whether because of personality issues or different ethos', this remained a sporadic relationship with the Arts Supporter mainly working without one specific base – rather in a range of buildings to suit the activity and purpose. Balby Library and in the Concertina Club in Mexborough have taken responsibility for successfully fundraising to maintain arts activities in ensuring a more sustainable community arts infrastructure.

### **Concertina Club**

*Through the course of the project, the Concertina Band Club has proven to be a creative hub for a variety of Mexborough-based RUOS projects, such as hosting meetings and events for the Ted Hughes Project as well as the monthly Cosy Cinema screenings.*

*Originally a 1970's working men's club which has also doubled as a brewery since the 1990s, the club had been a place for live entertainment and the arts in the past, but has struggled to stay afloat in recent years as live entertainment - predominantly music and theatre - became a rarity on the Concertina's stage.*

*The Concertina became involved with RUOS with the support of its landlord - Andy Pickering, a local councillor and has since provided an accessible backdrop to the arts activity that it hosts. The club's unassuming appearance - both on the outside and inside - lend the arts events inside an extra air of surprise for attendees and allows people to engage with the arts in a relaxed environment free from pretension.*

*Building regular arts activity at the Concertina has created a gradual snowball effect as more local groups and residents are engaging with, and putting on, activities there. The Concertina has hosted launch events for books written by local writers, Burns Night poetry celebrations as well as regular Open Mic sessions. With The Ted Hughes Festival and The Cosy Cinema continuing through 2016, the Concertina's tale as a rejuvenated and surprising art space continues to grow.*

Working with these existing community, but non arts, venues was shown to remove barriers to engagement in the arts, as they were consistently shown to reach the highest proportion of audiences new to the arts. They have proven effective both at reaching people already using the

spaces, such as regular drinkers at the bar of Woodfield or the Concertina clubs, while also bringing in a new audience to the venue. **The key success of working with non-arts venues therefore lies in the reciprocal relationship between the arts and the community infrastructure, which has the potential to regenerate parts of Doncaster.** This has not only been an approach taken with pubs and clubs but also with community centres and libraries. At a time when not only the arts but community resources of all kinds are under threat for funding this is clearly a model to be developed.

### **Balby Library**

*Over the duration of Phase 1 Balby Library has been a hub for creative community activity. The library is located mid-way on Balby Road, meaning the space is also a prime location for the area and therefore provides a useful information point. Through the outdoor installations it has also become both a site for art and for marketing and promotional activity.*

*Inside the venue regular workshop activities have engaged library users in creative activity, as well as brought new users to the library. Starting with a small upcycling group, developing activities that would feed into bigger events, the library has fully bought into the value of having arts activity and have seen their own footfall increase by approximately 60% - the biggest increase in a community run library in Doncaster.*

*As a result, with the support of RUOS they have successfully acquired funding to employ a local community member, trained by the Arts Supporter, to deliver weekly creative activity and is fast becoming a community arts hub as originally envisaged by RUOS. They are confident that it requires only a small amount funding to maintain the creative activity developed through RUOS and potentially grow the offer more in the future.*

*The impact it has made both on arts participation and community engagement are seen as highly significant in Balby. The library has joined the consortium for Phase 2 of RUOS which aims to focus on developing a local community arts infrastructure further.*

However even in Balby and Mexborough where the arts hubs are most established there was recognition by the Arts Supporters that all venues are **“unpopular with certain groups or inappropriate for certain activities”** and so it is important to work in other environments too. In Mexborough although the writers’ group who developed the **Ted Hughes Festival** meet at the Concertina Club they decided to put the festival on in Ted Hughes old school (now Mexborough Resource Centre) to reach a different audience. In Balby the Arts Supporter not only built the sustainability of the library but also worked in Woodfield Club and Woodfield Park to build an arts programme in very different settings. The community team argue that while the library and park are good for family activities, the club can attract a very different crowd.

### **Joining up the venues in Balby**

*Balby Unsung was a series of four events based around the stories of forgotten, little-known or otherwise unsung heroes from Balby, from history and the present day. The project was focused specifically on those living in Balby in an effort to attract those who felt disengaged from not only the arts, but from their local community as well.*

*The project was launched with a performance at the library of *Only Water Between*, Peter Spafford's play based on a series of letters written in 1918 between a Balby husband and wife. The husband was a soldier serving in WWI: however audiences were compelled by the story of*



*the wife at home with three children. The success of this performance led to three further events in 2015, based on similar themes of local unsung heroes.*

*Each event was designed specifically for different community venues and to be as accessible as possible and were free. The first event, the Hidden Exhibition, was based in Balby Library and guided attendees around the library discovering stories for themselves with readings and music.*

*The second event held in the working men's club, Woodfield Social, proved successful by blending the arts with live entertainment and staples of working men's clubs such as raffles. It used these familiar tropes along with the 1960s theme of the event to ensure its audience were not put off by the idea of attending an arts event.*

*The final event in the series was a more traditional piece of theatre performance set in St Catherine's House, based entirely around the house and the unsung heroes who have history with it. Again, this piece strongly relied on using a familiar local location as a gateway to intrigue those who otherwise may not have any interest in the arts. By showing that interesting art can indeed be drawn from familiar locations and local history, the Balby Unsung project is also, in many ways, a demonstration of "using the familiar to engage".*

In Rossington they have held meetings of the community team at a local market café to attract a more diverse range of people, but otherwise chose not to have an arts hub at all but to work in a more itinerant way, working with venues on a project basis. To this end Holmescarr was used for the **Fun Palace** while the café has been used for exhibitions of local people's work and the Miners Welfare Club as a base for the **Handmade Parade**. In the East pubs were used as the basis for creating a venues network which has extended to parks and the creation of a festival site in a nearby Watersports Centre (run by DCLT – a Consortium member). In Bentley the temporary sheds saw pop up work and surprise encounters in the park, on the green in the centre of an estate, outside the My Place community building, in a pinfold, and in a community woodland (reclaimed pit site). Whilst these activities had clearly whet an appetite for the arts, there was less confidence that they were sustainable without ongoing support.

**A key learning therefore is that building the community arts infrastructure can have considerable benefits both in terms of reaching new audiences and building the sustainability of these spaces, but awareness is needed about the new barriers such venues may create.**

### **3.2.4 Outdoors arts**

At the start of the programme there was a sense from both members of the consortium and the advisory group that working outdoors would reach those new to the arts in a way that crossing a threshold could not. A range of, usually free, outdoor activities was therefore provided as part of RUOS. These took place both in the town centre and in the designated communities and Included:

- 3 outdoor elements to coincide with each of the indoor performances at Cast
- DNweekeND which took place both inside and on the streets around Doncaster's shopping centre
- Outdoor cinema events in Mexborough which took over and transformed the streets to create a major local event

- The Ted Hughes Trail – which created an arts tour combining walking, poetry and storytelling to share the town’s heritage
- Handmade Parade in Rossington and Balby By The Sea - which both used pre-event mass participation to create large scale events
- Day of the Dead Celebration at Hexthorpe Dell
- Aspirations – using hoardings put up by builders to create an open air photography exhibition
- Something to Smile About Festival – Thorne Rugby Club fields
- A range of smaller (mainly music) events in parks

In the focus groups it was clear that the outdoor work did create a wow factor, often the most memorable experience people cited. As demonstrated earlier in the report such activity often gained positive local media coverage thereby raising the profile of the arts. But peer review suggested that the challenge was to provide excellence in the work produced. There was a feeling that much of the work outdoors lacked continuity of experience for the audience. Early activities such as **Cast of Thousands** at Cast were said to have been effective at drawing a crowd but did not have enough activity to keep the audience engaged and poor sight lines led to some negative feedback. This informed the decision to be more focused with the outdoor activity for **Kes** and **Colour of Time** and responses improved considerably as a result. Similarly despite the impact **DNweekeND** had in terms of audience numbers there were issues with the quality of the experience which the Creative Producer acknowledged needed to be addressed.

### **DNweekeND**

*The 2015 DNweekeND was a three-day arts festival animating Doncaster town centre in surprising ways. Over 4000 people attended the festival which showcased original commissions and existing work from live performance and visual artists. Programming the majority of activity outdoors allowed the DNweekeND to have a surprise pop-up element to it, bringing the work to public spaces, and allowing them to engage at their own speed.*

*“It’s a great initiative. We came into Doncaster especially for it, and spent money in the town. The town was buzzing and friendly. People were smiling, enjoying something fun and different”.*  
Attendee.

*However there was some criticism of the sheer spread of content. The festival covered two main zones in the town centre: Frenchgate Shopping centre and the Marketplace, and Waterdale Shopping centre and Cast. Within these zones activity was then spread again between 30 individual venues including shop units, squares, and various high streets.*

*“I wondered if there was too much, too spread out. It was hard to get around everything and everywhere. You’d have to be quite committed to leave the shopping centre for Cast on a whim.”*  
Michelle Dickson, Arts Council England

*This spread, coupled with inadequate signposting and unclear direction between and within zones, meant that in certain locations the festival lacked visibility and cohesion. Some attendees did not know that all of the activity was part of a collective programme and were therefore unable to connect the dots. This was in part said to be a capacity issue in its delivery but several people*

*questioned why the community, who were involved in the commission of N strand work were not more involved in delivery.*

*However feedback was still largely positive and there was clear support for the event to be repeated. So the Creative Producer plans to work with the new Community Associates to create an event with fewer zones and a clearer journey for audience members.*

It is clear that while outdoor work is effective at reaching large numbers it cannot just be seen as a simple tool for audience development. It requires a different aesthetic and expertise to indoor work. Outdoor arts were described as best used as a vehicle for celebratory work, such as events to showcase work created through community participation. **Balby By The Sea** and the **Handmade Parade** provided focussed outdoor events, that were both effective for the audience and celebrated the work done by the community. Without such activities there was a strong feeling that RUOS's impact would have been more limited.

Other outdoor activity that was less ambitious in scale was also praised for its clear focus. **The Ted Hughes Trail** in Mexborough tested the possibility of charging people to attend an outdoor event which are so often associated with free experiences. It not only sold out but there are plans to make it a more regular activity. It was described as transformational because it had a clear theme that allowed the event to have consistent aesthetic and clear community relevance and it was also believed that by being ticketed it was easier to encourage audiences to take part in other arts activities.

### ***Ted Hughes Trail***

*The Ted Hughes Paper Round was a guided two-mile, participatory walk highlighting places important to Ted Hughes, staged as part of the Ted Hughes Project in July 2015. In contrast to the surprise pop-up nature of the DNweekeND, the Paper Round was a ticketed event which people had to book a place on to in order to attend. While there were concerns that this might reduce its capacity to reach the unengaged, the promotion focused on celebrating Mexborough's heritage and, by having an activity which took the audience on what was essentially a creative walking tour, it allowed attendees to explore and learn about the area in an exciting and artistic way, without initially seeing it as attending an arts event.*

*"My favourite event of the festival was the Paper Round Trail. It was interesting, nicely-paced, relaxed, informative, quirky." Attendee*

*"I had heard that Ted Hughes spent some of his life in Mexborough and wrote some poems here. I went along on the walk and that was my initiation into literature really". Local resident*

*Many of those who booked to take part in the Paper Round prolonged their stay to attend the evening sessions staged inside Mexborough Grammar School, some saying they had never previously attended a poetry event.*

*"Influenced by Ted Hughes' extensive body of work, the festival offered a flavour of South Yorkshire, its flora and fauna and its people. This could have been an insurmountable challenge if it hadn't been created in such an inclusive, innovative and playful way. The influences of the Mexborough setting on the work produced for the festival bubbled and flowed through the entire*

Overall there was a sense from both staff and participants that work outdoors was effective at creating a sense of increased pride in the location where their work was sited. Some retail traders also said that it made an economic contribution, particularly in the case of **DNweekeND** which was based around the shops. But significantly data also suggests that while outdoor work may reach large numbers, it was no more effective at gaining audiences who were new to the arts than comparative work indoors. There were concerns, particularly from the Arts Supporters that like with any surprise encounter it was a challenge to provide pathways from such work, to ensure that audiences came back to other events, but where there was a clear link between the work outdoors and activities indoors and clear signposting between each this could be resolved.

**The key learning for outdoor work is that while it can be highly effective at reaching large numbers, it is vital that it has a clear and focused aesthetic in order to not to lose its audience. There remain challenges in measuring whether audiences at such events do become more regular arts engagers.**

### **3.3 How the programme built the capacity of individuals and what the implications of this are for the legacy of the work.**

A key aim of the programme was to build the capacity of artists and audiences in Doncaster, to create a more sustainable arts scene in town. For the programme to leave a lasting legacy it was believed that the latent talent in Doncaster needed to be released by enabling local artists to be more ambitious in their thinking. At the same time it was important that local residents were involved in defining the cultural offer, in order for the arts community to have a better understanding of its potential audience and to break down barriers to the arts among the non-engaged. It is clear from the findings above that the programme offered opportunities for both of these to happen. Local artists were given access to commission money and showcases for their work. Investment in designated communities was also used to build community teams and create local advocates for the arts. Together these contributed to building the capacity of individuals and leaving a legacy in the following ways.

#### **3.3.1 Developing the local arts infrastructure**

To support and develop Doncaster's fragile local arts infrastructure a key focus for RUOS was to provide a range of opportunities for local artists (amateur and professional) to develop their practice and their networks. This was done through a range of activities including:

- paid internships to create pathways into the arts profession
- open call commissions for professional and amateur artists
- showcase opportunities at the two annual DNweekeNDs
- Friday Hangouts, a monthly network for anyone working in the arts in Doncaster
- facilitated **Scripted** workshops for those interested in developing creative writing skills
- the Big Sing, which aimed to bring together the wealth of amateur choirs that already operate in the town, to create something collectively,
- a range of professional development sessions on event management, grant applications and marketing etc

- creation of the Doncopolitan arts magazine to raise aspirations and promote critical discussion of the arts in Doncaster

RUOS half funded (with Creative Employment Programme) paid internships for 9 unemployed young people, to address high unemployment in Doncaster. This achieved the aim of ensuring sustainable employment for them as all have gone on to secure further work beyond the placement, and all reported that it had helped them find their place in the arts infrastructure. However it is significant to note that those recruited while all unemployed were all graduates with a pre-existing interest in working in the arts and so although RUOS certainly supported them in achieving these ambitions it did not provide access to those opportunities for those not already engaged in the arts. This is a key challenge across the arts sector if it is to develop a more diverse workforce.

In terms of supporting existing arts activity in the town an audit identified that 150 individuals or groups were operating at the start of the programme. Many of these were contacted to explore what relationship they might have with RUOS. Networking and professional development activities were developed to build the capacity of local artists. These were initially well attended demonstrating an appetite for capacity building among this arts community, but this was seen to tail off during the programme, resulting in the Friday Hangout stopping and professional development becoming what some saw as more ad hoc offers and others described as responsive to need. Some staff on RUOS saw this as a sign of the success of the activity, as the sector became better networked there was reduced need for organised networking activity. There is also evidence of increased confidence from the local arts community as demonstrated by the rise in applications for Open Call commissions from 16 in the first year to 68 in the second and for participation in **DNweekeND** which went from 52 in the first year to 115 in year 2. With support from RUOS 6 artists or arts organisations have also gone on to make their first applications to Arts Council's Grants for the Arts fund and 10 new amateur arts groups are now up and running independently.

### ***Ted Hughes Project***

*In Mexborough tapping into local enthusiasm has seen the creation and development of self-sustained craft group MexCraft; a local cinema which has secured independent funding from Film Hub North and the Ted Hughes project which has used the fact that Ted Hughes had lived there to promote creative writing in the area.*

*"We are seeking to develop creativity — poetry, writing and art — in and around Mexborough, in Hughes's name. There is a significant tradition of poetry and writing in South Yorkshire, which we are seeking to uncover, tap into, liberate and develop."* Community team member

*In 2015, as part of RUOS the first Ted Hughes Festival brought together 350 attendees over three days of creative activity in the Mexborough area. It is estimated that at least 60% of festival attendees were from Mexborough and many had only limited, if any, engagement with literature.*

*"The whole weekend has been so enjoyable. The mix of events, from creative writing sessions to poetry readings, has been insightful; and has enabled me to appreciate literature so much more!"*

Local resident

*The Ted Hughes Project developed local arts infrastructure in Mexborough by challenging low and negative perceptions of the area and attempting to raise the collective aspirations of the residents. Through The Ted Hughes Project, the Arts Supporter and the team strove to prove that even on a relatively small budget, high-quality cultural events were more than a possibility. This drive to use the creative arts to celebrate the heritage of an area has continued.*

*The Ted Hughes Project has a constituted group of 15-20 individuals, who are all also engaged in other RUOS Mexborough events. The group has received external Arts Council Funding in order to deliver their next programme of events and to ensure the growth and development of the project moving forward.*

This demonstrates that RUOS has been effective at raising the profile and confidence of local artists. However some of the artists in the focus group felt the focus was too much on supporting the work RUOS commissioned rather than on the wider arts infrastructure. As a result they did not see the arts as better networked, rather that RUOS had provided additional funding opportunities and there were concerns that **“there is not enough happening here of a stable regular kind”**. This was seen as inevitable with such a short term project but it was felt that **“the only way the town will thrive artistically is if we can find the resources and impetus for people to want to stay here and make work here”** Artist - which required ongoing local investment.

However others felt that there were things happening that needed minimal support to not only maintain but develop and the best approach was for RUOS to promote this. The audit of 150 arts organisations was seen by some as a potential vehicle to promote the local scene, although there was some disappointment that the opportunity to develop this through the website had not been taken forward by RUOS. However RUOS felt that attempts to get people to update their own information on the website had not worked previously and so they were loath to upload information that would quickly become out of date unless the artists themselves took a pro-active approach to updating it. The new arts magazine Doncopolitan was seen as a better model to both provide an outlet for local artists to talk about their work and a forum for critical discussion about the arts in Doncaster. Initiated by RUOS but now self-financing this offers an opportunity for the local arts sector to raise its profile and self-organise without reliance on RUOS to do everything.

RUOS also experimented with underwriting new ideas which offered artists support without encouraging their reliance on funding. One attempt to test this approach took place in the East after the departure of the Arts Supporter. By investing in a local resident who already promoted charity events the aim was to test how his capacity could be developed merely by offering guarantees against loss, rather than a more directive commissioning approach.

**Pete Sullivan**

*Pete Sullivan is a local Thorne resident with extensive knowledge of the area and a strong network of local contacts. Prior to joining RUOS Pete ran small-scale live music events around Thorne under Thorne Charity Events in order to raise funds for local good causes.*

*“The relationship between me and RUOS began when I approached them for help with the projects I was already running in Thorne. We wanted help in becoming more self-sufficient, to be able to run our events without being reliant on sponsors. Pete Sullivan*

*Though Pete was well-versed in the managing and producing of music events long before his involvement with RUOS, since becoming part of the project and having the financial security of the project behind his decision-making, Pete has gained the freedom to take more creative risks with his events, as well as the opportunity to develop his own professional practice.*

*“Not only was the underwriting essential but the opportunity gave me the ability to broaden my own horizons and learn how to use, what were for me, previously unexplored art forms within my events, to add more depth and variety to what I love to do already.”*

*This rise in confidence will hopefully carry through into his future events under RUOS in Phase 2 and, it is hoped, into his own professional development also, but it demonstrates the need for support to develop community based activities.*

In addition to supporting artists from within Doncaster, both the RUOS staff and the community teams agreed that it was important to bring in artists from outside of town, who could both provide new inspiration but also variety to what could be offered locally. Artists such as **No Fit State Circus**, **Colour of Time** were commissioned to produce large scale spectacles as well as intimate showings of work such as **2 pints of Lager and a Piece of Contemporary Dance**. Within the local community teams artists from out of town, such as **Jason Singh** and **Handmade Parade** were also commissioned to support community projects.

Most people acknowledged that work from outside of town often generated more profile than work by local artists, which could play a role in raising awareness of the arts. But significantly the feedback on the work itself suggested that the national reputations were no guarantee of excellence either in terms of art or quality of engagement. Some people felt that this was potentially more of a problem where the artist brought with them a national reputation as it could **“reinforce prejudices - if a professional comes and just does their job”** and leaves without leaving a legacy. However where the artists embedded themselves in the community it could make local artists and audience raise their expectations and avoided the sector becoming too inward looking.

**Spiltmilk**, a national touring company, simultaneously demonstrated the ability to offer an experience that was not able to be offered by a local company; intensively engaged with a local community and produced creative work of high quality that raised expectations within one community – Bentley. Visual artist **Jacqui Symons** from Manchester similarly engaged a variety of groups with depth and integrity and produced a high quality final product – **The Bentley Chair** - which reflects local anecdotes and is showcased with significant pride.

There was broader consensus that the best contribution national artists made was when they offered something that could not be offered by artists already in Doncaster, hence broadening the menu of opportunities, or when they collaborated with local artists to leave a legacy. There are individual cases of national artists mentoring local ones, such as **Adept** mentoring a fledging theatre company called Rhea Productions but following an unsuccessful grants for the arts bid the group didn't continue. Similarly **Balby Unsung** have maintained contact with some individual

performers in Doncaster, and supporting their development and there is the potential for this approach to be more developed in Phase two.

**The key learning is that while CPP activity provides new activity in communities this can only be maintained with either sustained funding or greater capacity building of the local sector or better still both.**

### 3.3.2 Involve communities in decision making

Central to the ethos of RUOS was the involvement of Doncaster residents in the development of the programme both in order to ensure that they helped define the cultural offer but also to build capacity to drive sustainability and legacy. To this end:

- formal consultation took place before and during the programme
- many informal conversations/ consultations were facilitated in community settings(initial fieldwork)
- community representatives were involved at the initial stage of preparing an application for CPP and attending the Arts Council selection interview
- recruitment for Arts Supporters involved them delivering a workshop for designated community participants who then had a significant say in who was selected
- Arts Supporters set up community teams in their communities who were involved in commissioning and programming work over the 3 years
- representatives from teams informed the selection of borough wide N commissions

There were some discussions in the marketing team about the opportunities provided by social media to reach a wider range of voices, although to date it was acknowledged that RUOS had used it more to say **“this is what we are doing, rather than what do you want?”** Marketing. While some saw this as a way of reaching out to those who might not want to attend a meeting others felt that those engaged in social media tended to be those already engaged in the arts. Research evidence from elsewhere, on capturing public opinion via social media is very mixed. While some argue that those on social media tend to be more progressive (Wilson, 2010) others suggest that tick box voting processes result in more conservative outcomes (Parkinson, 2006). In Balby one attempt to use social media to garner opinions resulted in 100 contradictory viewpoints which proved unhelpful for the Arts Supporter and disempowering for those who contributed as it could not then be followed up. It is recommended that any experiments with social media to inform decision making requires further research before being implemented.

A strand activity started with “fieldwork” - informal conversations on the streets, in the shops or in cafes and doctors’ waiting rooms before project design started. Workshops were also held to kick start activity and ignite enthusiasm – and provoke discussion. In Rossington art classes were held in a café in the marketplace to get people talking. In Balby Upcycling workshops were started in the library. In Mexborough a writers’ group and craft group were formed at a community centre. In Bentley 500 people were invited to share their wishes with the Arts Supporter and these were incorporated into a large scale mural and in the East a network of local pubs were involved in discussions about what they could offer. Where there was a combination of informal conversations and workshop activity this was said to have attracted a broad range of local people from whom the Arts Supporters began to develop community teams. However the more narrow approach in Bentley and the East did not generate the diverse teams of the other areas. Where



they worked, the community teams offered a fluid structure with new people joining and leaving throughout the three years. This formed the backbone for decision making in the communities around the concept of creating a menu of opportunities to ensure diverse work for diverse audiences.

### **Community budgets**

*Each of the designated communities was given a budget for the community teams to spend each year to commission work. All the Arts Supporters said that the people who got involved in this process showed a good level of critical engagement from the beginning and had clear ideas about what they thought would work or not work in their areas.*

*However in the first year when artists were invited to submit ideas through open call the community groups and Arts Supporters were both disappointed in what was submitted. In year two and three therefore A strand communities took a more pro-active approach to commissioning work, identifying what they wanted themselves and then looking for the right artists to deliver this.*

*In Rossington the Arts Supporter organised Go and See trips to raise the ambition of the community team, while in other areas it relied on the relationship between the existing knowledge base of the Arts Supporter and the team. In all cases it created work that was truly defined by local people, but without the Go and See approach there could be the risk that the programme stays within the community members' or Arts Supporters' comfort zone.*

*There was however evidence that the community teams all became more ambitious over time and therefore more willing to take risks with what they programmed.*

In most areas the community team members saw themselves as representing their individual interests and did not claim to be representatives of their communities, but they have all become keen advocates for the arts, bringing new audiences with them. Most said they joined the community team, not because of an interest in the arts, but because they cared about their community. This reflects the findings from the post code analysis about the core audience for RUOS. But in Bentley where the original community team was made up of representatives of community groups often involved in community activity, rather than new individuals, they quickly became a barrier to the Arts Supporter reaching out, not an aid. This led to some competition and a drop off in interest so at the end of the first year the by then small team was disbanded and the Arts Supporter role was dis-continued to test a new pop-up strategy described above.

**One of the reasons that the programme was so successful in reaching audiences who were new to the arts therefore may be because it was designed by those who were also new to the arts.**

The greatest challenge for community decision making was seen to be ensuring that teams did not become too insular or cliquey but kept an **“expanding sense of who the community are or might be”**. In N and D strand, which did not have a community team, it was acknowledged that **“conversations that happened outside a meeting room were as legitimate as the ones that happened within the community group”**. In the case of Cast, although there was no formal decision making unit, it was argued that the community did inform the programme informally. In

year one, when **Glee Club** toured out of the venue, it started **“conversations with members of mining communities [who wanted] to see something that was relevant to them. Out of that came a conversation about what else we could programme that looks into those communities which led to Red Ladder coming here, but also feeds into a bigger conversation about the venue’s role”**. (Cast Director)

In N strand the community teams did feed into the decision making process for commissions but so too did conversations with the arts and business communities. There were differences of opinion about whether the community team model, which was seen to work so effectively on a hyper local level could work across the borough but concerns that if it didn’t community decision making could only have limited impact on the wider arts infrastructure.

### **Commissioning N strand**

*In the first round of Open Calls for the N strand two members of each community were invited to sit on a panel to read the bids and hear the pitches of the shortlisted artists. They were then asked to score the artists and give their honest feedback about the artist, the idea, and whether it was a fit for their community. These sessions were some community members’ first introduction to Right Up Our Street and, for some, had a lasting impact:*

*“[The commissioning process] was quite the thing for us, we kind of got thrown into it...and we saw the ones we voted for go through and that was fabulous.” Sue Jarvis, Woodfield Club*

*However in some instances there was a disappointment expressed from community members that the commissions they had played a part in selecting did not then connect with them in the delivery. In other cases people thought that the work was not as inspiring as they had anticipated at the point of commissioning and would have liked more input into how the work developed. Where they did have an ongoing relationship there was a stronger sense of ownership for the community which provided a more supportive space for the artist to work in.*

*“It was nice to be a part of it, and knowing that we helped nurture it and have an involvement in saying yes or no to what was going to happen as well; that was really nice – especially when it works, you do feel quite good about it.” Chelsea Lord, Balby Community Team member.*

Across the RUOS team there was a belief that the community involvement in designing the programme had positive outcomes both for the community and the art created and all were **“surprised by the level of engagement people are willing to give over a period of time”** when given a role to keep them motivated. This worked best where they were not just involved in the commissioning stage but their involvement followed through delivery to evaluation.

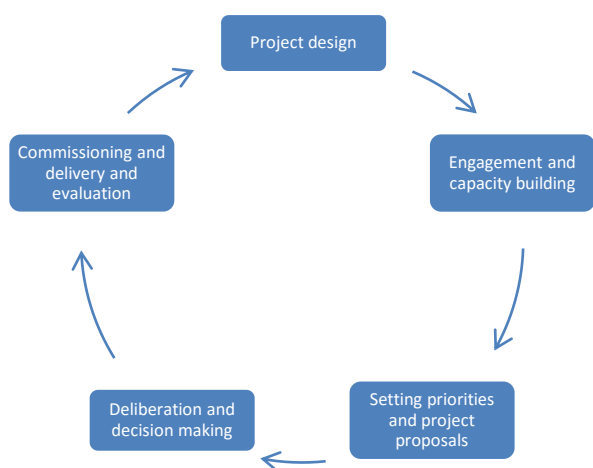
Both the capacity of the Arts Supporters to deliver a varied programme and the ability to maintain the commitment of the team was made possible by providing interesting opportunities for people to be involved in the delivery. Mexborough developed a larger team of volunteers, who not only helped out at events but absolutely made them by dressing up as characters “in role” or creating themed dressing for the site. In Balby the Arts Supporter ensured there was always something new to decide on at each team meeting, to make it worth attending. In contrast in Rossington it was said that in the last year, once the commissions were all handed out, interest began to wane as people didn’t know their role anymore. However this was quickly rekindled once Phase 2 was

confirmed and the team were given a clear steer on their future role, but this demonstrates the difficulty in maintaining commitment without purpose and tangible benefits. Community evaluation also played a role in this. In Rossington this was often done as a creative evaluation workshop, such as creating a post it note conversation to allow people to say things anonymously that they might not feel comfortable to do publicly. In Mexborough more formal minuted meetings took place and in Balby the approach was more tea and conversation. But all approaches were seen as a way both to keep people involved and to ensure that the learning was shared.

With the N commissions there was less of a sense of ownership in the projects, despite the community being involved in the commissioning process, because they were not involved again after the selection meeting. It was acknowledged that this lack of connection contributed to the lack of shared learning between A and N strands that artists described above.

***“I think we did miss a trick in not keeping them involved. I remember all the reps that came from different communities being so excited that they were selecting work and then afterwards not actually having that engagement as it was delivered”*** (Consortium member).

In line with the core principles of participatory decision making therefore RUOS found that community engagement is most effective where people are involved from project design, through delivery to evaluation, as defined in the model below.



Adapted from  
<http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/documents/Participatory%20Budgeting%20Toolkit.pdf>

**The key learning therefore is that participatory decision making can have benefits both for creating greater community ownership and helping artists understand their community needs. However it takes time to build trust so that communities will take risks and it requires their involvement throughout the process from agenda setting to delivery to evaluation. The key challenge for RUOS is to embed this practice not only in Phase 2 but more widely in the arts in Doncaster.**

### 3.3.3 Build capacity of individual volunteers and community activists

Providing opportunities for community members to become decision-makers aimed to create a sense of ownership of the work, which it is hoped will drive participation, as well as provide learning for the arts sector. However RUOS also aimed to provide opportunities for individuals to develop their own personal creative management skills raise their expectations of themselves and

boost the aspirations of their community - thus creating foundations for a strong ongoing community arts infrastructure. Through RUOS

- more than 50 people were active in the community teams at the end of the 3 years with many others having been involved at different stages
- 20 local residents undertook media training to develop their skills as radio presenters and reviewers to provide a critical community voice
- 50 people developed their performing skills as part of the community ensemble at Cast
- a pool of over 100 volunteers developed who were supporting arts delivery both locally and in the town centre

Work was done from the outset to not only recruit but to build the capacity of members of the community teams. As identified in the analysis of those engaged, most people got involved through an interest in their community rather than in the arts. It was therefore recognised that while they brought valuable experience from a range of perspectives which was important for RUOS to engage with, they also needed to be exposed to a range of artistic experiences in order to extend their artistic ambition. As one person said ***“I don’t think you can push and challenge taste if you aren’t accessing other experiences”*** (participant).

To this end a budget line existed from the beginning for Arts Supporters to organise Go and See trips for community members to provide a stimulus for discussion and ideas about what might be possible in Doncaster. In Rossington visits to Hebden Bridge’s Handmade Parade and Manchester Fun Palace directly informed their programming. In Balby the team used the money to fund trips to the theatre and research trips once the programme was already formed, including for example a trip to the Fairground Archive to gain resources for theming Balby By The Sea and in Mexborough the showing of the film Kes, alongside a trip to Cast to see the stage version was used for a discussion about the differences between film and theatre. The community teams were also exposed to a wide range of work through the commissioning process. Overall however the Arts Supporters did not prioritise this work and underspent on their Go and See budgets.

The Arts Supporters also acted as mentors to a number of individuals in their areas who had the interest or capacity to take a more active creative role. In Balby and Rossington members of the community team were trained as workshop leaders. In Mexborough they were supported in setting up their own groups and even publishing a book of local writing. Some of the individuals said that this had a transformative impact on their lives.

### ***Personal journeys***

*Felicity was a school lunchtime coordinator, and Chelsea a local mum, starting as workshop participants they were both given the chance to shadow the workshop leader. After shadowing they ran a supervised workshop and over time built their confidence to run their own sessions. Chelsea is now employed through Right Up Our Street to deliver creative workshops for adults and families at Balby Library and Felicity runs her own craft based group Sew Sew Good.*

*“I’ve always wanted to get involved in the arts somehow but never had any formal training...something that I regretted [until RUOS]” (participant)*

*Sue has been Bar Manager at Woodfield working men's clubs for years, and always wanted to put on live events there but not known how. Through RUOS she has had the opportunity to realise that ambition and in so doing reinvigorate the venue.*

*"I'm basically doing now what I have wanted to do for years and RUOS has given me that opportunity" (participant)*

*Sharon Richards, a local composer and choir-leader, was also mentored by the Arts Supporter, to enable her to fulfil greater ambitions. Not only did she get the opportunity to work with international beatboxer Jason Singh, but she has gone on to write her own musical.*

Cast originally planned to create a permanent ensemble of amateur and professional artists, working in the venue across the whole three years to create a strong sense of ownership as well as pathways into the profession. Following discussions with Equity, the actors union, about the ethics of using unpaid volunteers over a long period, as well as due to budgetary concerns about giving them adequate support and opportunities, it was decided instead to bring in different community performers for each show. This was also seen to offer a wider number of opportunities to a wider number of people but there was concern that it provided less opportunity for capacity building and legacy, albeit with ethical issues.

Despite this there is some evidence that a small number of people involved in the community ensemble got agents as a result of being in the ensemble and were making the transition into professional acting. Others were working or volunteering in other capacities at Cast and other venues in town. However Cast said that it was not possible to respond to all the needs of the diverse ensemble and therefore meet the expectations raised. Going forward Cast were keen to build on their learning by developing a more formalised ensemble or youth theatre, on the Contact Theatre model, where they also produce work for the main stage but they said this was not possible without specific funding. Overall it was felt that the ensemble built local ownership of the venue but more support is needed to maintain momentum for individual members.

One of the first projects to be initiated out of RUOS was the commission for Higher Rhythm to run Right on Our Radio on Sine FM. The aim was to produce a regular arts programme produced by community members. It was hoped that this would provide a space for discussion about the levers and barriers to engagement and develop the skills of those involved. Initially a general call for volunteers to deliver the programme was sent out but recruiting proved harder than everyone imagined. Despite being a community radio station Sine FM said they struggled to find people who had both the skills to present on radio and the knowledge of the arts to talk confidently about it. It was therefore decided that RUOS would train a pool of community journalists who might contribute both to the radio and to the website (which in turn could feed the local press).

20 people took part in media training but despite this initial enthusiasm active engagement beyond the training fell down. Three people were later recruited to go out and review work for RUOS and they have contributed to the website, Doncopolitan and marketing have disseminated them on social media. Sine FM however did not find a way to continue to deliver the radio show without ongoing RUOS funding.

In terms of the pool of people who got involved as community team members, volunteers or just regular participants there was an overwhelming sense that the processes described throughout this report all contributed to the development of the individuals involved, from informal opportunities to develop confidence through discussion to more formal training and mentoring, but it was also clear that **it required dedicated staff time to support the individuals' development.**

Examples of the journeys undertaken by individuals:

<https://vimeo.com/164317816>

<https://vimeo.com/162643934>

<https://vimeo.com/171554460>

<https://vimeo.com/140908743>

#### 4. Legacy and sustainability

A condition of Creative People and Places funding is that programmes should have a long term vision even though allocated only short term-funding. Legacy and sustainability of RUOS activity was therefore a key focus throughout the programme and has seen the establishment of and support for a range of ongoing initiatives including:

- 10 new voluntary arts groups and audit of 150 existing professional and voluntary arts
- Further commission opportunities for artists supplied by the successful application for phase two funding for Creative People and Places
- 6 organisations being supported in writing applications for follow on funding from Grants for the Arts
- Balby Library applying for community funding to fund a part time freelance an arts worker
- The Woodfield and the Concertina clubs both becoming established community venues
- Waterdale and Frenchgate Shopping Centres offering to commission public art
- Doncopolitan established as a new arts magazine for Doncaster
- 4 community teams, consisting of approximately 50 community arts champions
- new assets such as cinema kit in Mexborough (purchased with Film Hub North funding), scenery and props from Balby By The Sea, Bentley's pop-up sheds all available as shared resources
- Range of non-arts venues, such as pubs open to future programming of art activity

There was a sense across the RUOS team that the programme had achieved its primary aim of raising artistic ambitions in the town, both amongst the artistic community and amongst local people, creating a more secure foundation from which the arts might flourish. The programme was also felt by the focus group from the community teams to have offered a combination of challenging work, and work that responds to the everyday participation people are comfortable with. This was seen as key to the success of reaching those new to the arts.

It was felt across the RUOS team that developing community and local arts infrastructure offered a real opportunity for sustainable arts activity in Doncaster and that by involving local people in defining this cultural offer helped remove barriers to engagement. However there remained concerns about how this momentum could be sustained without ongoing investment. Despite the enthusiasm of teams of active volunteers created in the designated communities there were concerns that they needed finance to make things happen and professional input to keep expanding the horizons of what was possible.

Many of the groups that had formed through RUOS are now fundraising to maintain activity, from Balby Library getting funding for ongoing weekly arts sessions to Doncopolitan using advertising to keep the magazine going to Ted Hughes Festival obtaining funding from the Arts Council through Grants for the Arts. As the lead member of the consortium and one of the Arts Council NPOs darts are well placed to offer fundraising support to these groups, a responsibility which they are already taking on, but this has capacity issues for darts, and when these bids are not successful, due to the sheer level of competition for funding, there remain concerns that this may reinforce resistance to the arts rather than build confidence.

In the next three years CPP funding for Phase 2 will militate against some of this by enabling continued working with the community teams to further build their capacity to deliver work in their communities and inform decisions about activities, such as DNweekeND in the town centre. However there remains limited evidence of the learning from RUOS being embedded in the core arts infrastructure in Doncaster and this poses real challenges for the longer term sustainability of the programme.

Going forward and having whetted the appetite, the challenge is to ensure that enthusiasm is maintained. The increased expectations for CPP areas to increase their earned income in Phase two is already forcing consideration of ways to increase box office revenue, through less free events and more pay what you can approaches, but findings so far both within RUOS and elsewhere are that such activities are more likely to engage existing arts enthusiasts, than to break down barriers for those new to the arts.

Far from a sense that people were not interested in the arts there has been a sense throughout RUOS that **“this is what [Doncaster] has been waiting for and without RUOS and all the talking it wouldn’t have started at all”**(participant). The sense of changed perceptions towards the arts noted in the local press, alongside the pride and confidence expressed by members of the communities team demonstrates that RUOS has **started “green shoots, then the buds, now it’s beginning to blossom ”**. The challenge is to ensure this continues.

For one member of the consortium they have **“questioned occasionally the wisdom of locating an area of need and then parachuting artists in in great quantity – that’s okay as long as it’s sustained, but if it’s just two or three years then that’s silly”**. The findings, in this report, demonstrate the value of increased investment in a town such as Doncaster. But it also highlights the risk of short term investment in raising awareness and interest in the arts, if this does not lead to long term investment to maintain activity in areas of low income and low capacity.

RUOS has demonstrated that there is an audience for the arts, when the arts are taken to them and have shown local people that they can play a role in defining what is delivered. But in the current economic situation it is vital that Doncaster, which has historically suffered underinvestment in all public services, is able to not only maintain but increase investment for the arts. While the Arts Council can't overturn all forms of social inequality, neither should it reinforce it through lack of long term investment in communities such as Doncaster.

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