

THE STORY OF
RIGHT UP
OUR STREET



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CONTENTS

RIGHT UP OUR STREET	6
A background	6
What is Right Up Our Street?	8
PEOPLE	10
Arts infrastructure	12
Community decision making	18
The trusted friend	22
PLACES	28
Building community hubs	30
Surprise encounters	36
The great outdoors	42
PARTICIPATION	46
Was the art excellent?	48
Using the familiar	52
Getting involved	56
Numbers and new faces	60
The value of gifting	68
CONCLUSION	72
What do we know now that we didn't know before?	74
What next?	78



RIGHT UP OUR STREET

"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."

– Doncaster bid for Creative People and Places 2013

Potential.

It's a word that's often coined to describe places like Doncaster, and is both exciting and possibly limiting. Doncaster was recognised to have great creative potential with many creative personalities working largely in isolation: however it lacked a real arts network with the funds available to fully realise this potential. Doncaster had the people, the tools and the appetite to build an arts network, but what it lacked was a catalyst to bring those elements together so they could turn Doncaster's potential into a reality. It lacked a beacon that could shine a light on all of the arts activity in the town. In fact all it needed was the spark to light that beacon. Right Up Our Street was born to provide that spark and to ensure it could be seen - and used - by the communities within Doncaster.

Whilst Doncaster was home to a massive range of experienced artists, from painters to poets, it was also full of unique, undiscovered creative talented people who had never experienced the arts before. Working across this broad range of people would come with its own challenges. With these challenges to be met, we saw three years of parades, parties, and performances: theatre, cinema and dance: painting, embroidery and crochet. Right Up Our Street and the people of Doncaster embarked on a three-year journey of discovery together in the hope of creating something to last for much longer.

What follows is the story of that journey.

pictured: DNweekeND





WHAT IS RIGHT UP OUR STREET?

Following a successful funding bid to Arts Council's Creative People & Places fund, Right Up Our Street brought together prominent arts and cultural organisations from Doncaster into a consortium. This consisted of darts (Doncaster Community Arts), DCLT (Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust), DVAN (Doncaster Voluntary Arts Network) and Cast, the brand new performance venue in the town centre. The consortium's task was to lay the foundations of a growing, high-quality arts network almost from scratch in three years. The decision was made to split RUOS into three clear strands:

The D Strand: delivered entirely by Cast, this strand focused on commissioning three theatre shows with strong roots in local history and culture.

The N Strand: under the guidance of Creative Producer, Andrew Loretto, this strand was supported by its own funding pot to commission local and national artists to create new works of local significance in Doncaster.

The A Strand: focused on five areas within Doncaster where there was little evidence of regular arts activity (Balby, Bentley, Thorne, Mexborough and Rossington), this strand employed five Arts Supporters to build networks in these areas and work closely with community members to create and commission large and small scale art projects for their community.

Combined, the three strands - the DNA of this new arts network - created 2,500 opportunities for the people of Doncaster to take part in arts activity, which resulted in 100,000 participations over 3 years in the first phase of RUOS. On their own, the numbers mean little. At the end of Phase One, the vast quantity of data, feedback and research gathered was compiled into an evaluation report by Dr Leila Jancovich of Leeds Beckett University that was designed to reflect on those impenetrable numbers and provide learning points that RUOS could take forward into its next 3 years.

What follows are the stories that made up the fabric of RUOS Phase One: stories that give meaning to the numbers and to the learning points provided in the original report in the hope that it becomes an accessible resource for future projects.

pictured: Thorney Beginnings, Marvellous Middles and Moorends by Excavate



ARTS INFRASTRUCTURE

To say we had no arts or culture activity in Doncaster before RUOS would not be true. There were already three Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations: darts, a well-established participatory arts organisation with a near 25 year history was just one. There was also Higher Rhythm, which runs a local community radio station (Sine FM) as well as media training programmes and provides music industry skills for local people; the newly completed Cast, a brand new performance venue in the heart of the town. RUOS was in a position to provide new links between these organisations - as well as with DCLT, DVAN and Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery in a genuinely collaborative arts network, involving members of the community and artists who lived and worked in the town.

Cast, darts and a Creative Producer (Andrew Loretto, employed towards the end of the first year) each led one strand of RUOS. While this ensured the effective and detailed creative delivery of the three separate strands of the programme it was felt by some that, by not having one Creative Director, RUOS lacked real creative leadership. One consortium member commented that RUOS felt like *“people 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.”*

pictured: DNweekeND



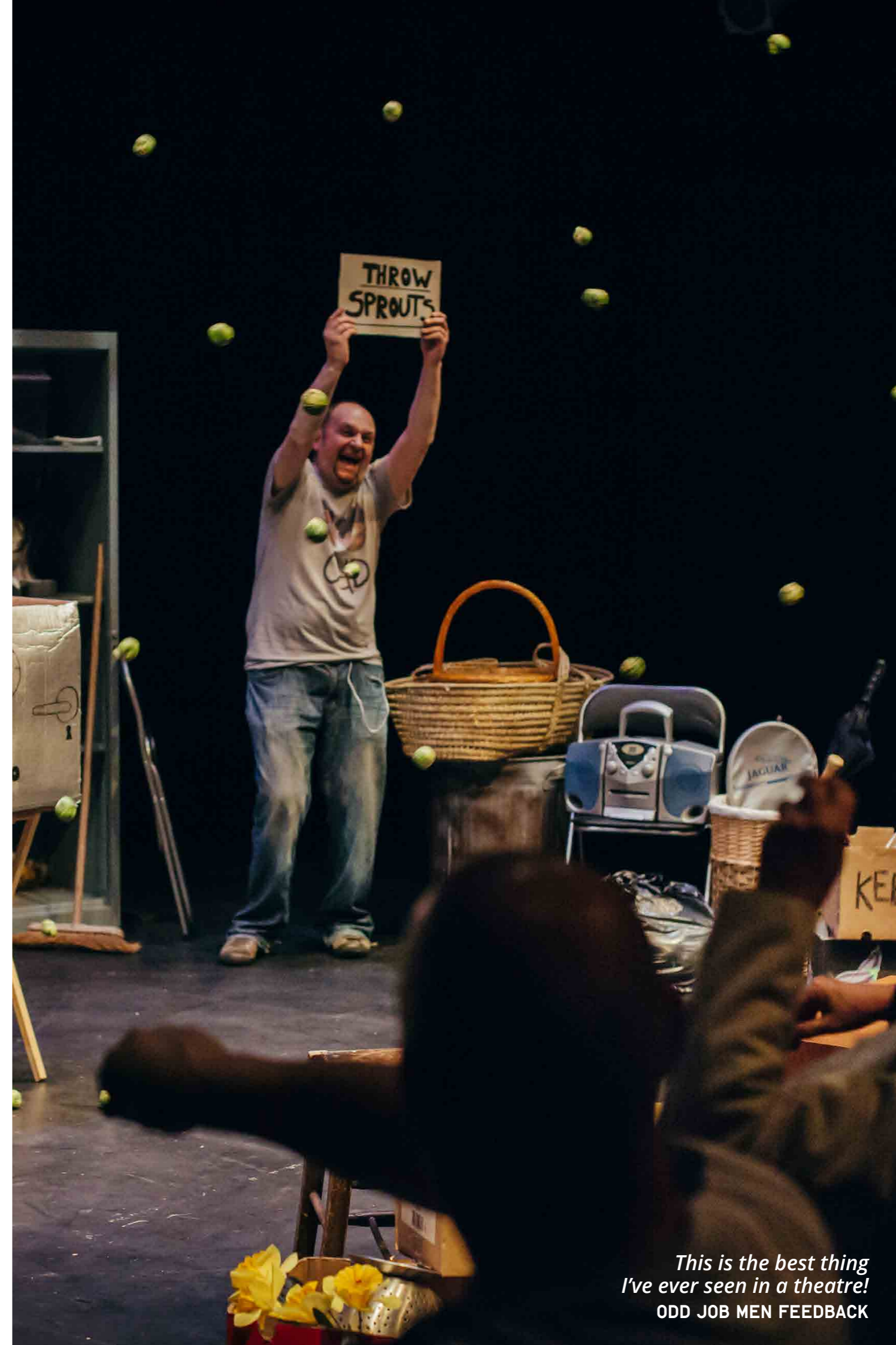
I have never seen so much fun happening in the Marketplace in the 15 years I have lived in Doncaster!
DNWEEKEND VISITOR

As a result of this concern and to prevent any competition between strands, the decision was made to second the CEO of DCLT, Michael Hart, to oversee the overall practical leadership of RUOS. The decision was also made to form a Creative Team which would bring together the artistic lead for each strand in regular meetings to discuss and plan the overall artistic content and direction – and to maximise connections between strands. Unfortunately, in practice because of capacity issues, actually getting every member of the team in the same room together proved difficult.

The benefits of organising RUOS into 3 strands meant it was able to: make decisions in different ways about how to distribute its money effectively; commission work through different processes; make sure creative activity made use of a range of facilities in the town centre and the five target communities; and to ensure that participants had access to a range of activity in terms of scale and ambition.

While some of this money went on brand new projects and opportunities - such as several paid internships and open calls - much of RUOS' efforts focused on supporting and improving the existing arts network in Doncaster. Making contact with local community members and organisations started RUOS along the road of being a 'trusted friend' in Doncaster. What better way to gain Doncaster's trust than by engaging with those who were already trusted?

pictured: Odd Job Men by Rich Seam Theatre



*This is the best thing
I've ever seen in a theatre!*
ODD JOB MEN FEEDBACK



Promoting different art forms proved effective in our joint goal of opening people's eyes to the arts.

PETE SULLIVAN

CASE STUDY: PETE SULLIVAN

One of these existing 'trusted friends' within Doncaster was Pete Sullivan (pictured), a Thorne resident with near-encyclopaedic knowledge of the town. Pete had built his own local network through promoting small music gigs around Thorne for a variety of charities. Pete approached RUOS, who agreed to underwrite any losses Pete's events would make in future. While Pete's business meant he was far from new to the arts before becoming involved with RUOS, the security of RUOS' involvement was like a safety net for Pete, enabling him to take more risks and dream a little bigger with his events.

"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," Pete explained, as he was able to expose his audiences to more complex art forms through his live entertainment events.

Pete's horizons were broadened even though he was not new to the arts, and now he has the freedom to share this with the people of Thorne. For Phase 2, this snowball effect must continue to grow as Pete's confidence continues to rise.

KEY LEARNING

While RUOS' influence and funding naturally created new activity, this activity can only be maintained if funding is sustained and wisely invested in order to create a legacy.

COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING

One of the fundamental principles of RUOS was to involve Doncaster residents in making decisions about its art projects and to work closely with them through as much of the process as possible. Community consultations ranged from formal meetings to informal chats in the street and were focused on building a bond between the five Arts Supporters and their respective communities. The reliable personal presence of the Arts Supporters in the five areas appeared to provide a human element that removed barriers between RUOS and the public, and soon more structured community meetings were being set up: from upcycling sessions in Balby to writing workshops in Mexborough. From these initiatives, the first community teams blossomed, with the Arts Supporters providing a link between the community teams and the RUOS structure.

The five areas would have varying degrees of success with the twin Arts Supporter and community team model. Offering a flexible platform for individuals to come and go from the group as they pleased, this approach ensured a diverse range of voices in the creative planning, delivery and reflection process. Some community teams gelled better than others and, even when the team was largely made up of those new to the arts, these individuals were driven by a desire to do something good for their community. Unfortunately, in two areas, the community teams became bogged down by a lack of connection between groups and individuals, resulting in negativity. What should have been the most powerful resource for an Arts Supporter to tap into instead became a roadblock. As a result, the community team approach was abandoned in Bentley and Thorne.

The mixed success of community decision making is something that provides many learning points as RUOS moves into Phase 2. The constant drive to prevent community teams becoming inward-looking cliques proved to be successful in some communities, but, due to the differing needs of the areas and the individuals who become involved, the community team model may not be a one-size-fits-all model for the whole of Doncaster.

pictured: Community consultation from The Pop-Up Sheds



CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY BUDGETS

One way of keeping community teams invested in projects taking place within their areas was the use of community budgets. Each area was given a specific budget for the community teams to commission work. All the Arts Supporters agreed that the community teams brought a highly informed level of critical thinking about what would and would not work in their areas and were well placed to commission work.

In the first year, however, the community teams were disappointed when their open calls did not produce creative responses they felt excited or entirely happy with. In following years, community teams and Arts Supporters pro-actively went out to find artists who they felt would fit with the aspirations for their areas. This marked a notable increase in the ambitions of the community teams who grew in confidence as the project went along.

Some of the community budget were spent on Go-See trips for the community teams - trips to visit art exhibitions and performances across the country to provide inspiration and to broaden the horizons of community members. There is evidence to suggest that this was effective in some areas in raising the ambitions of local people while still making sure that there was a local flavour to A Strand projects.

KEY LEARNING

Ultimately, community decision making was most effective when community members were involved in every stage of a project, from concept to delivery. This meant that communities could truly take ownership of their own art projects. The fact that communities have shown a desire to have projects like Mexborough's Ted Hughes Poetry Festival and Rossington's Handmade Parade (pictured) return is evidence enough of this. The challenge for Phase 2 is to use learning from this model to encourage a cross-pollination of ideas across different areas of Doncaster.





THE TRUSTED FRIEND

Working in an area where the average person may not have much experience with the arts, RUOS had to overcome a number of barriers to get a high number of people involved in its projects. One of these barriers was how to transform the perception of RUOS from merely a financial consortium into a trusted friend that people would rely on for quality art and quality experiences. If RUOS could shape its brand in this way, then people who attended a cinema event, for example, may be encouraged to try a poetry event based on the strength of their first experience with RUOS.

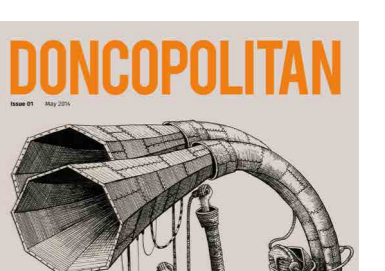
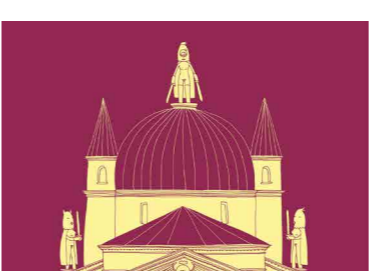
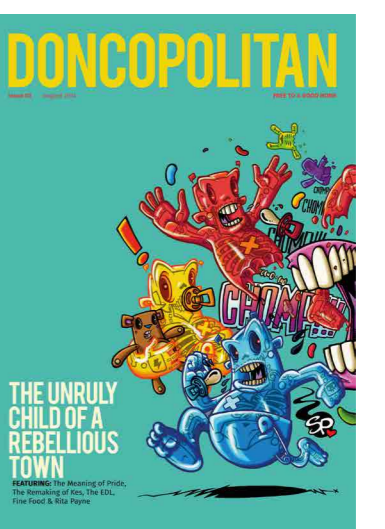
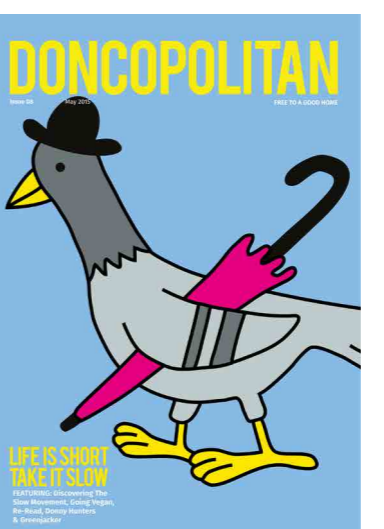
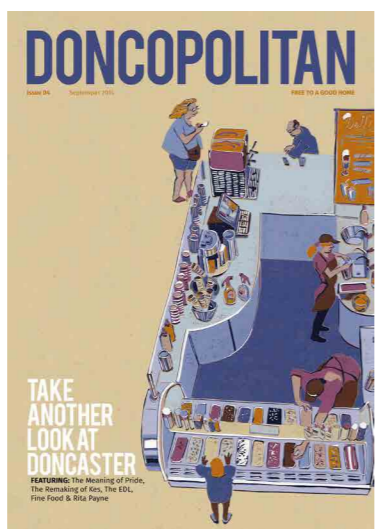
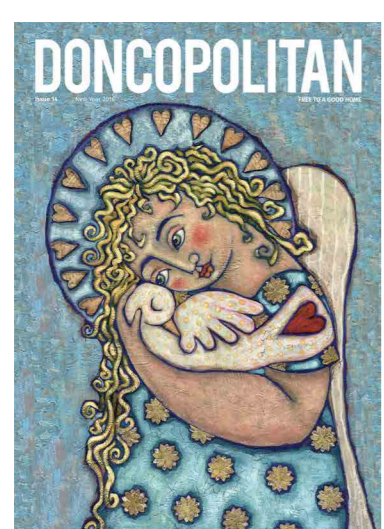
The decision was made to turn the concept of RUOS into a one-stop shop for any arts activity in Doncaster: as a means to highlight existing arts activity as well as creating new projects. The five Arts Supporters based in the five areas were tasked with tapping into the existing activity and discovering what appetite there was for different arts opportunities in their respective areas. While active in delivery of their own projects, many Arts Supporters felt they were not used as effectively by other artists from other strands and were often *“treated like a flyer agency”*, as one Arts Supporter commented.

pictured: Balby By The Sea



RUOS committed to building a website and mailing list which would provide information about all arts activity in Doncaster to build a wider awareness of RUOS as a brand. It also commissioned a radio show on local community station Sine FM - Right On Our Radio - as well as supporting the launch and production of early issues of Doncopolitan arts magazine (pictured.) The idea was that these three would be signposts that would direct their audience to arts activity across the whole of Doncaster. Whether RUOS achieved this, however, is disputed.

One member of a pre-existing art group commented that if RUOS *"haven't got total ownership then they're not interested"*, a claim mirrored by Higher Rhythm (the organisation behind Sine FM). While both sides pointed fingers at the other, Right On Our Radio struggled to create a consistent product and it was mutually agreed that the programme should not be renewed after its second year. While a noteworthy experiment, Right On Our Radio represents a missed opportunity to create an arts programme for Doncaster. Doncopolitan magazine also faced some criticism from the community for not being appealing enough to those disengaged from the arts - which was, ultimately RUOS' remit - although some staff at RUOS believed it did prove popular with more than those within existing arts communities. Its continued life is evidence of this.





It is events like this that make our Mexborough shine.

HELEN MCCABE PRAISING THE OUTDOOR CINEMA

CASE STUDY: THE ROLE OF ARTS SUPPORTERS

For the general public, it can prove difficult to place any kind of trust in a faceless brand, particularly in areas such as Doncaster where trust has previously been broken or which have seen a lack of serious investment in recent years. The Arts Supporters were brought on board to be one face of RUOS and provide a clear link between RUOS and the communities. Having Arts Supporters as a regular familiar presence within communities helped to both promote RUOS projects effectively and to build engagement. It soon became clear that the public tended to connect events to the Arts Supporter rather than to RUOS as a 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,'" noted Helen McCabe of Mexcraft (pictured, far right.) "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!"

Situating the right Arts Supporter in the right area proved to be a highly successful means of building engagement: however for the public at large it also created trusted individuals in the Arts Supporters rather than a Doncaster-wide trusted brand.

KEY LEARNING

The right individual in the right area can indeed build trust, but a much more structured and strategic approach towards marketing and commissioning needs to be taken Doncaster-wide in Phase Two. The key challenge is in determining how the trust and engagement built by individuals can be translated into trust of RUOS as a brand.



PLACES

BUILDING COMMUNITY ARTS HUBS

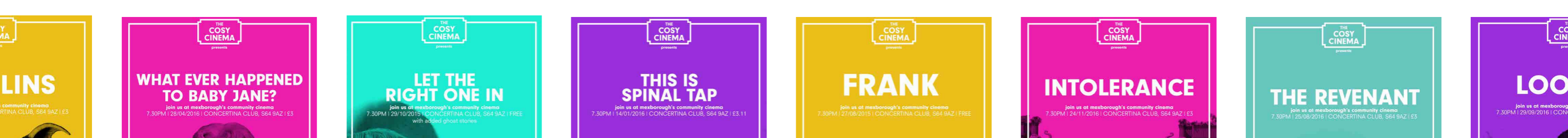
Initially, the plan was for each area to have a fixed arts base that would act as a base camp for the Arts Supporter in that area. It was soon realised, however, that each area had very different needs and so a fixed, Doncaster-wide approach would not work. This problem can be summed up in a tale of two libraries: whilst Balby Library (pictured) proved to be a great place for the Arts Supporter to start connecting with their community and it soon played host to a range of activity, in Bentley the library committee took some convincing. Building interest in the project across Bentley as a whole was more piecemeal, which meant the Arts Supporter had to put on a variety of pop-up events around Bentley first to win the library and the wider community over.

It was recognised that people needed somewhere they could identify with and take ownership of that they felt comfortable attending, but it also became obvious that restricting activity to one space would mean that RUOS' reach was limited. To expand this reach during the life of Phase One, RUOS set up shop everywhere from working men's clubs to libraries, from parks to streets and from cafes to rooftops. To reach people who may not have experienced art before, it was important to branch out into non-arts spaces as well as the traditional theatres and galleries. When it worked, this approach successfully reached out to those who felt intimidated by arts venues and provided a boost to local businesses by raising the profile of community centres and resources. The biggest successes saw the previous non-arts venues that were a home for RUOS blossom into places that regularly hosted the arts.

Some of these venues were existing community centres, such as Rossington's Holmescarr Centre which already ran regular arts and craft activity (mainly focused on adults with learning difficulties). Balby Library has now successfully attracted those new to the arts with regular creative activity, and has seen its footfall rise by 60% as a result. Admittedly, some of these places became reliant on the Arts Supporters and struggled to take ownership of the projects they hosted. However, venues as disparate as Balby Library and Mexborough's Concertina Band Club, an unassuming 1970s working men's club, have shown a willingness to take responsibility for fundraising and developing their arts activities.



Such an inspirational piece for Doncaster.
BALBY'S FIELD OF POPPIES SPECTATOR



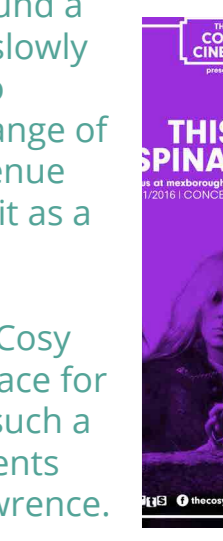
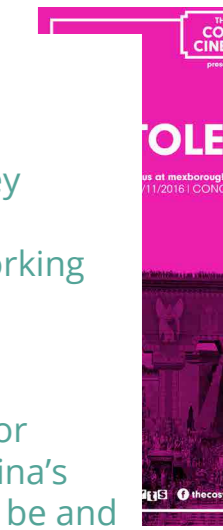
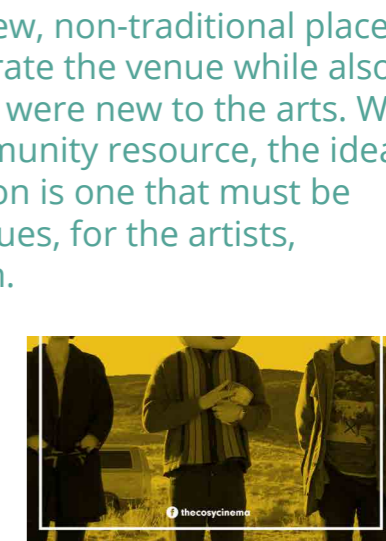
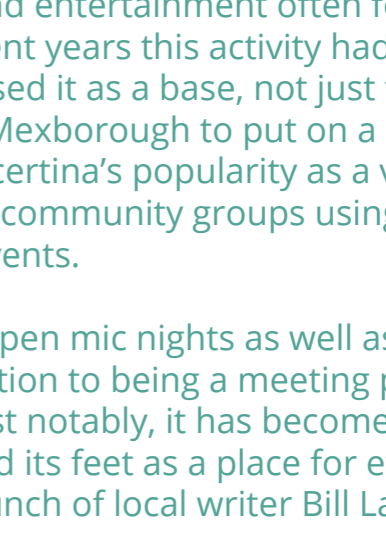
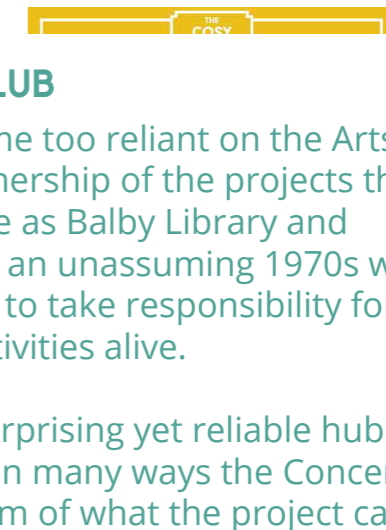
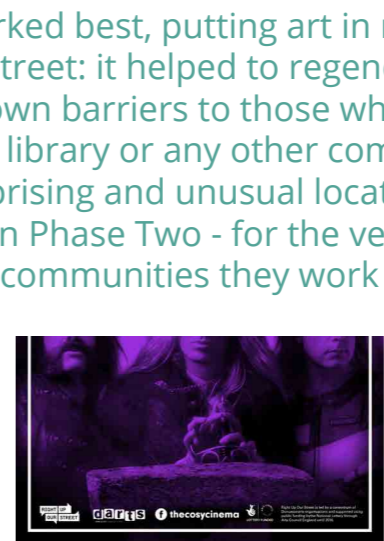
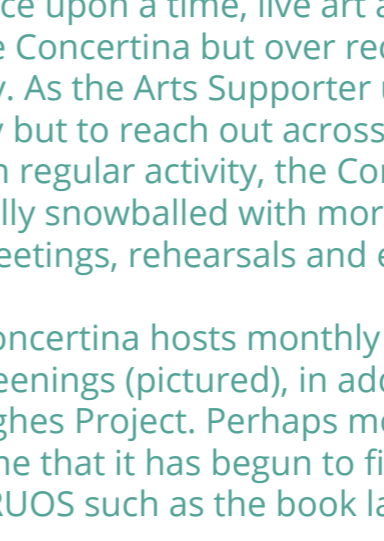
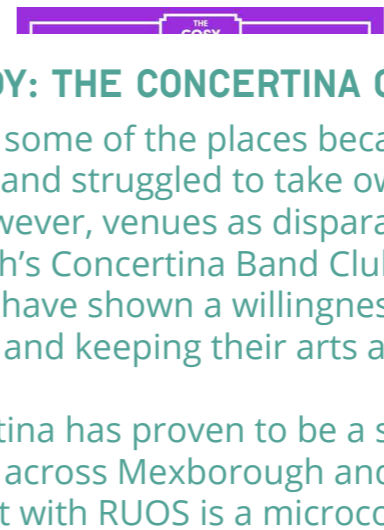
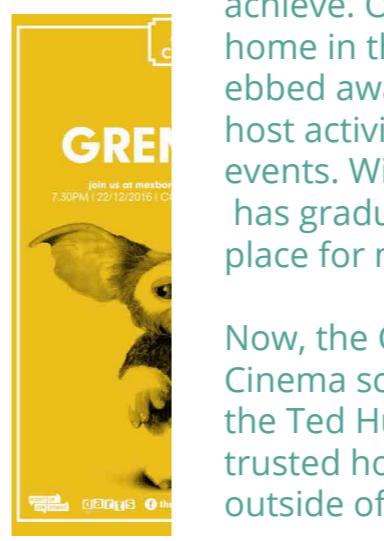
CASE STUDY: THE CONCERTINA CLUB

Admittedly, some of the places became too reliant on the Arts Supporters and struggled to take ownership of the projects they hosted. However, venues as disparate as Balby Library and Mexborough's Concertina Band Club, an unassuming 1970s working men's club, have shown a willingness to take responsibility for fundraising and keeping their arts activities alive.

The Concertina has proven to be a surprising yet reliable hub for arts activity across Mexborough and in many ways the Concertina's involvement with RUOS is a microcosm of what the project can be and achieve. Once upon a time, live art and entertainment often found a home in the Concertina but over recent years this activity had slowly ebbed away. As the Arts Supporter used it as a base, not just to host activity but to reach out across Mexborough to put on a range of events. With regular activity, the Concertina's popularity as a venue has gradually snowballed with more community groups using it as a place for meetings, rehearsals and events.

Now, the Concertina hosts monthly open mic nights as well as Cosy Cinema screenings (pictured), in addition to being a meeting place for the Ted Hughes Project. Perhaps most notably, it has become such a trusted home that it has begun to find its feet as a place for events outside of RUOS such as the book launch of local writer Bill Lawrence.

When it worked best, putting art in new, non-traditional places was a two-way street: it helped to regenerate the venue while also breaking down barriers to those who were new to the arts. Whether a club, pub, library or any other community resource, the idea of art in a surprising and unusual location is one that must be developed in Phase Two - for the venues, for the artists, and for the communities they work in.



CASE STUDY: JOINING UP VENUES IN BALBY

Balby Unsong (pictured) was a series of events taking place throughout Balby, designed to attract people who not only felt disconnected from the arts, but from their local communities as well. The stories of the events were all based on overlooked, forgotten or otherwise unsung heroes of Balby from the past and present.

Spanning from its launch, an intimate performance of Peter Spafford's *Only Water Between* at Balby Library, Balby Unsong saw performance and events at Woodfield Social Club and St Catherine's House and combined live art, theatre, music and entertainment events such as raffles and variety shows through the course of its lifespan. The pieces used locations familiar to Balby residents to intrigue and excite that audience and demonstrated that interesting art could indeed be drawn from hyper-local history and stories.

KEY LEARNING

When it works best, putting art in new, non-traditional places is a two-way street: it helps to regenerate the venue while also breaking down barriers to those who are new to the arts. Whether a club, pub, library or any other community resource, the idea of art in a surprising and unusual location is one that must be developed in Phase Two - for the venues, for the artists, and for the communities they work in. However, awareness needs to be raised about the new barriers these locations can potentially create.



Not only was this a club night, it was a theatrical event, with a narrative and some beautifully poignant moments.

BALBY UNSUNG REVIEW



SURPRISE ENCOUNTERS

Part of what helped RUOS attract those new to the arts was that, in reality, it did not attract them at all: it took the art to them. This approach was backed up by all the data collected throughout the strands, which led to the A Strand and DNweekeND commissioning several diverse projects that were made up of pop-up events that the audience found themselves at, rather than attracting an audience in a traditional way. The surroundings the art took place in - particularly if it was not a traditional art venue - were seen as an important factor in getting rid of any pretension surrounding art in the eyes of the audience.

CASE STUDY: NINA VON DER WERTH'S PUB DANCES

While having longer programmes of events was important, it was also important to surprise audiences with short, unexpected and exciting events in places that were familiar to them. One commission based on this idea was Two Pints Of Lager and a Piece of Contemporary Dance (pictured.) This was a surprise dance piece that toured various pubs in Doncaster in secret - that is to say, without any marketing or local awareness whatsoever - that proved popular with unsuspecting audiences.

Neither RUOS nor artist Nina von der Werth did any planning or engaging with audiences before each event apart from getting permission from the venue owners. This was one of the most direct examples of taking the art to audiences rather than attracting an audience to the art, and it got a positive response as a result.

It's something I've seen on holiday but never round here!

TWO PINTS OF LAGER AND A PIECE OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE SPECTATOR

CASE STUDY: POP UP SHEDS

This approach was of particular benefit to Bentley, where the Arts Supporter and community team model appeared to create more barriers than it pulled down and working in depth in the community proved difficult. The Arts Supporter left and the community team crumbled at the end of the first year, leaving a sizable hole for arts activity in Bentley.

This led to the creation of The Pop-Up Sheds (pictured,) which were built by artist Dan Jones to form a mobile, versatile art space. While their initial use was as a portable art base for an area that did not have a permanent one (leading to them becoming known as the Bentley Sheds), the all-purpose nature of The Sheds meant they popped up across Doncaster at a variety of events throughout the lifespan of Phase One. The Sheds were a vital tool to take art across Doncaster, particularly in areas like Bentley where attracting an audience proved difficult and they gave the people of Bentley a project to take real ownership of.



*It looks fantastic- so outstanding-
and that is just on the outside!*

BENTLEY LOCAL ABOUT THE SHEDS

Both Two Pints and The Sheds commanded the attention of audiences by placing the art right in front of them which naturally meant they reached a number of people who otherwise would not have attended an arts event. However, the somewhat up close and personal approach of many pop-up projects did prove uncomfortable for some audience members who may not have wanted to engage – and reportedly found it intrusive. It was therefore vital that artists respected the boundaries of the audience but also did not take themselves too seriously. A sense of humour often helped reduce the intensity of the event for the audience.

Perhaps most important, though, was the need for the artist to build some mechanism for repeat engagement into the activity. The difficulty was making sure the audience left the event feeling able to search out other projects, as otherwise the pop-up events would simply become a one-off novelty that would be quickly forgotten. Whether it was a simple contact form or the artist staying back after the event to discuss it with their audience, the artist could help ease people into feeling comfortable enough to seek out other arts activity.

KEY LEARNING

Surprise encounters have the ability to be exciting and powerful experiences for audiences, but if there is no plan beyond the pop-up experience then their value is open to question. Pop-up events do not have to be a one-and-done deal for audiences provided the artist has some way of engaging them after the event.

pictured: Pop-up activity outside Balby Library





THE GREAT OUTDOORS

As part of the drive to put on surprising, unusual art that was new to Doncaster audiences, it was decided early on that RUOS would head outside and work outdoors as part of its remit. As a result, streets, parks and fields in Doncaster were lit up (sometimes literally) with works of art and, from the Day of the Dead lantern parade to Mexborough's outdoor cinema, RUOS did fulfil this aim.

Part of the reasoning behind supporting outdoors art as RUOS did was because audiences felt it created a Wow factor that indoors events sometimes struggled to match. It also provided an appealing angle for local media who could help raise the profile of the arts in Doncaster. However, the key challenge RUOS set itself was to ensure that these outdoors events were excellent in content and execution - that they had something of substance to them.

Making sure these events provided a range of excellent experiences for audiences proved difficult in the early days of RUOS. For example *Cast of Thousands*, one early piece based outside *Cast*, succeeded in drawing high numbers but a lack of clear focus - in addition to apparent weak practical planning, meant some audience members struggled to see or hear the action - and so were put off by it.

CASE STUDY: TED HUGHES TRAIL

The Ted Hughes Trail (pictured)- although it was a ticketed event compared to DNweekeND's surprise free pop-up approach - was also an outdoor event that covered a large area. The Trail was a guided two-mile walk that took audiences on a tour through the landmarks of Ted Hughes' youth in Mexborough. The walk was peppered with surprise encounters, poetry readings and other performances and, along with the festival having a clear focus and visual aesthetic throughout, helped create a playful yet captivating journey through Mexborough. The Trail was presented as a celebration of Mexborough, and as a result managed to engage many people who previously had never attended poetry events, but who would go on to attend more in future.



The mix of events - from creative writing sessions to poetry readings- have enabled me to appreciate (local) literature so much more.

TED HUGHES POETRY FESTIVAL ATTENDEE

CASE STUDY: DNWEEKEND

DNweekeND was a three-day arts festival that took place in and around Doncaster town centre. Showcasing original commissions and existing artwork from visual and performance artists, DNweekeND predominantly took place outdoors, lending the events a pop-up feel that allowed the public to engage at their own pace and on their own terms. As a result of this, it was a highly successful event in terms of drawing a crowd, but the sheer size of the event - covering two huge zones in the town centre, each containing dozens of venues - meant some events were hidden away and did not appear to be part of the festival - or indeed were not found. Indeed, many audience members did not connect all the events to the same festival, which was a hindrance to RUOS' efforts to be a 'trusted friend' brand.

While the focus and artistic excellence of DNweekeND was variable, the festival largely received positive reviews from audiences. There is plenty of learning to be applied for future festivals, both from DNweekeND 2015 and from other outdoor events that were praised for their focus, such as The Ted Hughes Trail (pictured.)

LEARNING POINTS

While outdoors events can be a useful tool to reach high numbers of people, it is vital that the net is not cast too wide and the art is not stretched too thin. Outdoors events should keep a clear focus and have a consistent visual aesthetic to build a recognition and trust between the art and its audience. This makes for a much more meaningful experience for audience and artist alike and goes a long way towards securing repeat engagement.



PARTICIPATION

WAS THE ART EXCELLENT?

RUOS judged the excellence of their projects by applying their own set of criteria for success. For each piece of work the question “Was the art excellent?” was judged based on three points of view:

Public assessment, which was recorded formally and informally through a combination of community reviews, feedback from community teams and conversations with (or overhead from) members of the public.

Peer assessment, captured through reports and quarterly meetings between staff, as well as media coverage.

Self assessment, which saw RUOS staff reflecting on their own performance.

There was ongoing debate through the life of the project about whether the art created met RUOS’ description of excellence. According to focus groups (of staff, artists and audiences), many large scale events with a Wow factor could be considered excellent. In contrast, many people also preferred smaller, more intimate, even one-to-one experiences. While this approach proved more meaningful to those already engaged with the arts, to others the idea of a one-to-one poetry reading or portrait drawing was uncomfortable and embarrassing. It seems that, when it comes to size and scale, a range of diverse approaches is necessary.

What most focus groups seemed to agree on was that the most excellent art (and excellent engagement) was created when a professional artist worked closely with local people but still kept a steady hand in the project. When too much control was given to the community or community teams, quality was often diluted. When too much control was taken from these people, it led to frustration and a loss of engagement for those planning and taking part in the project. Finding this balance proved difficult for many projects.

When it did work, however, it resulted in high engagement and a high quality artistic end product, as with Balby By The Sea. This event, hosted at Woodfield Club in Balby, combined Arts Supporter curated performances with entertainment hosted by the club to create a spectacle that used seaside nostalgia to make itself accessible before easing audiences into vibrant and meaningful performances.

pictured: Dancehall



Right Up Our Street is unlocking all of this stuff going on and bringing it to the surface.

- REPEAT PARTICIPANT



CASE STUDY: COLOUR OF TIME

One example of a large-scale project that was often cited as excellent is The Colour of Time by Artonik, a colourful theatrical dance parade, with participatory elements, through the town centre which made use of powdered paint in its finale. While members of focus groups felt it provided an unusual, splendid and entertaining spectacle for Doncaster, few said that they felt challenged. While The Colour of Time certainly succeeded in drawing a sizeable audience and starting a conversation about art, there were some question marks over whether it had enough meaningful content to be considered excellent.

KEY LEARNING

While there were many high quality projects during the life of RUOS, the pool of artists who really knew how to combine high quality artistic content and execution with truthful community engagement was surprisingly shallow. Many artists commented that the idea of working so closely within and with communities was new to them - an interesting irony considering RUOS was about working within communities where many people were new to the arts. Both artists and communities need to learn from and give to each other in order to create a lasting legacy of excellent art.

What an amazing and inspiring performance. I think everyone felt like we were part of something much bigger today.

COLOUR OF TIME PARTICIPANT

USING THE FAMILIAR

As one of the main aims of RUOS was to bring the arts to those unfamiliar with it, using things that were familiar to reach these people proved to be a key theme running through the whole project. Since research had shown that even the most comfortable arts audiences generally tend to stick to a narrow range of arts activities, using something familiar to local audiences was a tactic RUOS used to appeal to both the engaged and the disengaged. However, there was a discussion within RUOS about whether being too reliant on the familiar could hold back the artistic quality of a project if it ended up relying on nostalgia.

From Cast's D Strand putting on theatre shows with a local theme and involving local people to make sure there were familiar faces on stage, to the N Strand hosting pop-up performances in pubs to the A Strand going out on the streets and tapping into existing networks and communities, there was a massive range of ways for RUOS to use the familiar to help get rid of the fear some local people may have had about getting involved.

The word 'art' itself is an unfamiliar and intimidating word to many people: however the marketing team were able to overcome this by appealing to the local desire to do something within the community.

pictured: Bentley VE Day Party by Spiltmilk Dance





CASE STUDY: SPILTMILK'S VE DAY PARTY

Some artists, such as Spiltmilk Dance, found a familiar approach particularly useful when engaging with audiences.

"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," noted one member of Spiltmilk. *"Instead, we were able to put it very simply that we were throwing a community party, everyone's invited. We focused on these key selling points to get people to the event, and then let them get creative once they were there!"*

The Spiltmilk event - a VE Day celebration, in itself a familiar event with particular visual themes in the public's mind - proved a huge success, attracting over 750 people of all ages. Having marketed the event as a celebration rather than an arts event, couched in Union Jacks and 1940s nostalgia, the barrier to engaging a large audience was removed and those in attendance saw a high-quality contemporary dance performance.

KEY LEARNING

Spiltmilk Dance, coupled with other similar successes such as Mexborough's Outdoor Cinema (which combined accessible, mainstream film with performance aspects to elevate the experience), Balby's Field of Poppies (linking into the centenary of WW1) proved that using the familiar to engage does not need to be a barrier to high-quality art. In fact, it can often break down barriers between the art and the audience, and while artists must be careful to avoid relying entirely on nostalgia there can be no doubt of the impact it can have on attracting audiences when used effectively.

What a fantastic event! V.E Day must have been fabulous in 1945. Our Bentley Party was brilliant with lots of camaraderie and friends old and new- it must have been wonderful in real time.

BENTLEY VE DAY PARTY AUDIENCE MEMBER

GETTING INVOLVED

From the very beginning of the project RUOS sought to get the people of Doncaster involved in every stage of the creative process and delivery of a project. However, following the struggles of Adept in delivering Hand In Hand to ensure a high quality project was delivered when a team of volunteers had the majority of creative control, ongoing questions were asked about how to convert participation of individuals and groups into a quality, engaging product. Through the course of the project, RUOS gave chances for diverse community ensembles to take the stage in Cast productions, for local community choirs to work with composers in The Big Sing and for community members to take part in art installations, parades and other events like the Handmade Parade and Day of the Dead.

Simply providing the opportunities for local amateur arts groups did not prove to be enough to drive people to engage with the project, though. While RUOS faced some criticism for not making the creative process accessible enough, some local amateur art groups did not help matters by being generally unenthusiastic about getting involved. In many cases commissioned artists found the groups they worked with unwilling to adapt or change.

The main exceptions to this were arts groups in areas that had an Arts Supporter to drive the connection between RUOS and local arts groups. In the case of Mexborough, it has seen local arts groups expand to work outside of RUOS, completely independently. In total 10 new local arts groups have been formed through RUOS, from writing groups to choirs to craft workshops.

pictured: The Bentley Library Chair by artist Jacqui Symons and community members



What a fabulous piece of community work. It got everyone talking and evoked a lot of memories. A thing to treasure, with memories for young and old.

BENTLEY LIBRARY CHAIR PROJECT PARTICIPANT



CASE STUDY: ROSSINGTON FUN PALACE

Inspired by the national Fun Palace campaign, the Rossington community team developed a family event that combined arts and science activity. The Fun Palace (pictured) made use of the skills of local people as well as the connections and expertise of the Arts Supporter. The community team also made use of the Go-See budget to visit another Fun Palace in Manchester to experience first-hand how to put on a Fun Palace event, which raised the ambitions of the team.

The event attracted around 500 people, who largely stayed longer than expected. Some even stayed all day and took part in as many activities as possible. This meant that, although the attendance figure was lower than the target of 1000, there was a feeling that many more attendees would have diluted the quality of the experience and people would not have engaged with as many activities or stayed as long. The quality of the experience meant that the event engaged new people at more depth than was expected, boosting the community team and local workshop groups affiliated with RUOS.

It was felt the combination of community members and professional artists was a real success story that greatly helped raise the ambitions of the community team.

KEY LEARNING

Converting initial community participation into deeper engagement has been the challenge facing the whole project. It is recognised that achieving this is the best way to ensure crossover between events and to build an audience willing to spread the word and to continue to try new things themselves. There should be a symbiotic relationship between participating in the creative process and the finished product at the end of it all.



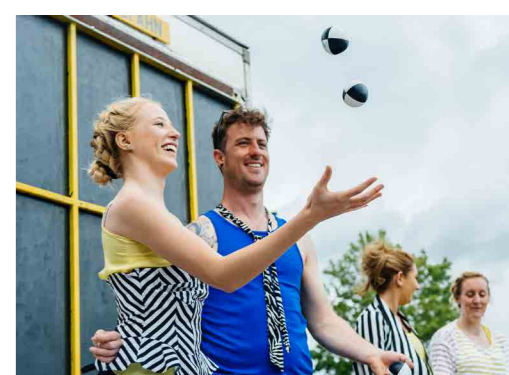
NUMBERS AND NEW FACES

RUOS' two key challenges - to engage people new to the arts and to create sustainable arts for the future - needed two very different approaches to succeed. To engage people new to the arts across Doncaster, RUOS needed to cast its net wide to work with a massive range of people across the town. However, RUOS also needed to work in depth with smaller groups of people to build sustainable projects and work in local communities, as well as Doncaster-wide, which resulted in the decision to create three strands with three different approaches.

Across all strands, combining these two approaches proved difficult and provoked ongoing debate. In the D Strand Cast particularly struggled to balance working in both depth and breadth. The plan was to form a small community ensemble that would voluntarily participate in shows on Cast's town centre stage in an effort to reach a broad audience across Doncaster. Cast attracted just over half of the audience that it expected at the start of the project, and while the numbers in the community ensemble grew over the first and second years, they dropped in the final year.

Cast admitted that, as a new and rapidly evolving organisation, they did not have the capacity to keep people - on the stage and in the audience - engaging in the yearly productions and the chance was missed to build a real sustainable working relationship with their community ensemble. At this point in the organisation's development Cast's focus was more on shorter term launch and awareness raising projects rather than a longer term engagement strategy.

pictured: DNweekeND





NUMBERS

Cast's work outside its own stage was felt by RUOS to be more successful, in particular Colour Of Time which attracted around 1,000 people, a positive response for a first event of this kind. Participants/ audience mostly left feeling they had experienced something high-quality and many had more open minds about what was possible in Doncaster as a result. However, there is no firm evidence that this kind of large-scale, centre-of-Doncaster work always provided a higher quality or attendance than community-based events such as Balby By The Sea (pictured.) Taking into account that Balby By The Sea had a long and thoughtful build up, with outreach workshops, it also attracted just under 1,000 people, like Colour Of Time, but anecdotally it also kept the attention of those who were new to the arts and was more successful at encouraging them to go on to take in other arts activity. While high-profile art projects like Colour Of Time, and even Handmade Parade who did work in a community setting, did manage to raise the artistic ambitions of the community teams, they did not guarantee the art would reach more people on an ongoing basis.

One project that did reach high numbers was the three-day DNweekeND festival hosted throughout Doncaster town centre. While there was a discussion over its quality due to the massive spread of activity across the town centre, it attracted around 4,000 people. More importantly, around 65% of those people were new to the arts and many were enthusiastic about going on to take part in more arts activity. This, coupled with the boost it gave to local businesses, meant that DNweekeND has a solid platform on which it can build a more focused, higher quality offering in years to come. DNweekeND experimented with a range of new activities and performances: these stimulated debate of excellence. Experimenting should be seen as an important way of seeking and establishing definitions of excellence – not something to be avoided in order to ensure safe success.



NEW FACES

A focus on single events did help RUOS reach large numbers, but this was not the only target RUOS had to hit. One Arts Supporter said, *"I don't care if 100,000 people turned up if they're already engaged. I care if you get half a dozen and they've never engaged before but as a result they go on to engage more."*

This attitude was behind the drive to build a sustainable arts network in Doncaster, one that brought in people new to the arts and kept them interested and involved. The work in the five communities achieved most success with this: 4 out of 5 people in the audience for community projects were new to the arts. Some of these people felt they had been interested in art all their lives but had never had the chance to get involved before. Others saw RUOS activity as a chance to do something in - and for - their communities rather than pursue an artistic endeavour. This means for Phase Two, a balance may need to be struck between appealing to audiences who want to participate as part of their community life and on driving this audience towards the arts at large and further afield.

Working in depth within communities meant the options available to audiences had to have the potential to be similarly deep. So, work ranged from taster sessions to regular craft groups to constituted groups that allowed audiences to decide how much they wanted to then get involved. They could dip a toe in with a taster session or dive in and get heavily involved with delivering work regularly as part of a community team. Working in depth with small numbers in this way also allowed some work - such as Rossington's quilt, which was made with the help of a few but was toured around the village and then venues in town centre for all to see - to be exhibited for a broad audience.

pictured: Silhouette portraits of RUOS participants and team members by artist Alana Tyson

Key to breaking down the barriers with communities, which helped RUOS work in depth, was the creation of community teams. While these teams were often inspired by the Arts Supporter's own background - for example, in Mexborough where the Arts Supporter had a theatre background there was more of a focus on literature and performance - all the community teams surprised RUOS with their willingness to give up their time for their communities. This was particularly the case when the community teams played a role in commissioning work for their areas, with the differences in each community team ensuring a diverse range of art across Doncaster.

KEY LEARNING

While, at times, the temptation to chase high numbers may be great, it is important for artists working in Phase Two - to be aware that working in depth with smaller groups more effectively breaks down barriers that stand in the way of reaching new audiences. What art can offer that is hard to quantify in data and pounds-spent-per-person-reached terms is inspiration - and providing inspiration to individuals who can take that inspiration into their own communities is one of the great legacies forged by working in depth. Balancing this with producing and showing large-scale work for large numbers will be a key challenge going forward, but the value of transforming individual community members with the desire and will to transform their community over time should not be understated.

pictured: The Bentley VE Day Party by Spiltmilk Dance



THE VALUE OF GIFTING

One of the beliefs that led to the development of RUOS was that Doncaster was full of artistic talent, and that this talent simply needed to be given the right opportunity to flourish. In that sense, RUOS always had gifting at its core - not just in terms of funding for local artists, but in letting community members work with and get expertise from artists from around the country.

The idea of gifting always needed to be two-fold: RUOS needed to give opportunities to local arts groups and artists, but it also needed to work with the wider arts community to bring national artists to Doncaster. After all, the primary aim of RUOS was to attract those unfamiliar with the arts. For the project to leave a lasting legacy, it needed to do both of these things in order to give artists and community teams the confidence to take risks outside of RUOS, and to continue doing so once the project had ended.

It is clear from all the findings gathered over the course of Phase One that, even though many projects had varying degrees of success, RUOS did deliver this. Local residents gained the confidence to start up their own groups, such as Mexcraft, while local promoters such as Pete Sullivan in Thorne were given the freedom to take risks and expose their existing audience to a wider range of art forms. Local artists were given access to commissions and a showcase for their work, and local audiences were given access to a wide network of arts activity - though the extent to which they engaged with that network varied.

pictured: Rossington's Handmade Parade



Such is the feeling of goodwill towards the event, a new committee has formed to carry on running Rossington's Handmade Parade.
ROSSINGTON COMMUNITY TEAM

Perhaps the most valuable gift RUOS gave through its community focus was the upskilling and experience it gave to its volunteers. Through RUOS funding, Balby Library, Mexcraft and The Cosy Cinema, as well as The Ted Hughes Project, are all now either constituted groups with external funding or self-sustaining entities. RUOS built the foundations for all these groups, but they have now been built upon by community members who have confidence and skills they may not have had before. Balby and Rossington saw community members trained as workshop leaders, allowing them to act as ambassadors for the arts in their communities. Should this upskilling within communities continue through careful guidance from RUOS then the project will have a legacy that far outlasts its lifespan.

pictured: Handmade Parade workshop





Our Ales
ARE NOTED
ARE QUOTED
ARE VOTED
THE BEST

CONCLUSION



Never been so impressed in something in all of my life, and when you see your work amongst it... wow!

BENTLEY LIBRARY CHAIR FEEDBACK

WHAT DO WE KNOW NOW THAT WE DIDN'T KNOW BEFORE?

When RUOS began, the belief was that the perceived apprehension towards art in the town was more down to lack of investment and vision than any lack of enthusiasm from the public. As the opportunities began to impact the local communities in Doncaster, there was a sense that *"this is what [Doncaster] has been waiting for."*

Through RUOS' successes and failures, there is plenty of learning to be taken from how RUOS met this desire from Doncaster people. We now know this enthusiasm for the arts does need to be brought out of Doncaster people at times by bringing the art to their doorsteps and involving local people in decision making to help break down walls between the audience and the art, as well as acting as a motivator to keep local people engaged. By keeping communities involved in decision making through delivery with correctly-judged input from a professional artist, communities will gradually gain confidence and be willing to take greater risks with projects.

What Phase One should have done is allow RUOS to properly gauge the needs of each community so proper practices can be put in place for Phase Two. On the other side of the coin, however, there needs to be a clear balance between community input and artistic direction or the quality of the finished product will suffer. Artists and community teams need to give to and learn from each other equally.

pictured: Pop-Up Shed activity in Bentley



What is important is that this link between the audience and the art is maintained: several projects suffered because they simply “parachuted in” artists to an area of need without putting any structure in place to keep audiences interested. A professional artist who truly gets community engagement seems to be a relative rarity, but when one is found they usually produce excellent work. This does not have to be limited to large scale events, either: pop up events can be very effective in engaging brand new audiences, but only if there is a plan in place to keep the audience engaged after the event. Different areas and different audiences have entirely, different needs, however, and there needs to be a broad range of large-scale and smaller, more intimate events.

The most effective projects were ones that bridged the gap between high-quality art and a disengaged audience by using familiar themes to sell themselves. This did not mean a project had to rely on nostalgia and did not necessarily limit the quality of the art on show. If this familiar element is informed by community teams it makes for a more appealing prospect to tempt disengaged audiences in, but it can also be worked into the art to provide a relatable offer for the audience.

RUOS as an organisation learned much throughout Phase One, but needs to apply all its learning into a Doncaster-wide plan. The key learning that runs throughout every section of this report is consistency: to create a lasting legacy RUOS needs consistency. Consistency of quality, consistency of personalities and consistency of marketing approach to keep momentum from Phase One running high.

pictured: DNweekeND

WHAT NEXT?


RUOS has whetted the appetite of local people for arts activity in Phase One and community teams across the town have responded with enthusiasm. However, with Phase Two being given much less funding, the challenge is for community teams to form constituted groups and use the expertise gained from Phase One to fundraise, to continue to develop the work, and to keep their momentum.

Looking to the future, RUOS needs to use its funding wisely to support and continue to build on the foundations that were laid in Phase One. RUOS still has a lot to do to continue to build on these foundations in order to nurture Doncaster's arts infrastructure at large. There are concerns about how its finances, funding less personnel, are going to support enthusiastic community teams, never mind maintaining the level of activity seen in Phase 1.

Doncaster is an area that has long suffered from a lack of investment in every area, not just the arts. RUOS had demonstrated that with initial and sizeable investment a change in attitude to creative participation is achievable. What art - and RUOS - have been to Doncaster so far is a catalyst and a talking point for people to think positively about their communities. Continued investment is required to sustain the change. It was widely recognised that three years was not enough time to effectively build a fully-fledged arts network, and It is planned that the next three years will bring more conversations, more decisions, more actions, deeper levels of involvement and higher levels of commitment from local people that prove real change in their town is always possible.

pictured: Dancehall



A large crowd of people, many with colorful body paint, are gathered outdoors in front of a modern building with large glass windows and wood paneling. The scene is vibrant and festive, with people clapping and raising their hands. The background shows a clear sky and the building's architecture.

Right Up Our Street has injected an energy of creativity into the town allowing the community to engage and be enlightened - realise - that culture and the arts can be for everyone and not the elite few.

- COMMUNITY TEAM MEMBER



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