THE LOUNGE:
ART BURPS IN ROEHAMPTON'S ALTON ESTATE FOR WANDSWORTH ARTS FESTIVAL

Evaluation Report

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1.0 Executive Summary

144 Community Participants · 15 Workshops · 4 Public Events · 555 Audience Members

Building on the success of Emergency Exit Arts’ Birdbrain project in spring/summer 2012, The Lounge was a high quality arts engagement project which activated one of the most focal public
spaces in Roehampton. The project transformed the green by Roehampton Library (where Danebury Avenue meets Roehampton Lane) on the Alton Estate into a temporary site of outdoor arts activity, with ‘Art Burps’ programmed by and for local community members. It was funded by Arts Council England and the National Lottery as part of a larger application to Grants for the arts by Wandsworth Arts Team for the Wandsworth Arts Festival.

The green became Roehampton’s only outdoor sitting room, The Lounge, a temporary event site for Wandsworth Arts Festival 2013. The Lounge hosted a range of arts interventions ranging in scale and cope from micro art installations, through a pop-up photo booth with 2D props and a percussive musical instrument for 0-5 year olds, to a spectacular evening fire garden with music and pyrotechnics, all created in collaboration with local residents including groups from Minstead Gardens Sheltered Housing Scheme, Eastwood Children’s Centre, and Youth Services. On the final day of the Festival, The Lounge was rebuilt in St Mary’s Church Square, Putney, as part of the Shimmy, Wandsworth Arts Festival’s culminating event.

The Lounge was intended not to end with the Wandsworth Arts Festival events but to catalyse interest and enthusiasm around the Alton Estate for continuing arts programmes over more sustained period of time, and to build contacts and support for further fundraising to this end.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

- To engage members of Roehampton’s community in an exploratory creative process-enabling them to try new things
- To engage members of Roehampton’s community to develop new skills through a facilitated process of creative consultation, ideas development & creative programming
- To support community members to create new art work for their whole community to benefit in innovative ways and settings within their local environment.
- To generate high quality artistic programming for Wandsworth Arts Festival- transforming public space in Roehampton into dynamic and interactive happenings (Art Burps)
- To train a team of community members to become the ‘media team’ and take on the responsibility for marketing events locally using creative marketing strategies and more conventional techniques (including feeding into poster design and maintaining the project blog site)
- To enable community members to exchange and support one another’s creative ideas by visiting each other’s Art Burps, reflecting on the shared experience of programming their Happening and on making it happen in Roehampton.
- To actively encourage members of the public from other wards of Wandsworth to travel to and interact with the creative offer generated by local programmers
- To empower and support community members to realise their creative ideas, providing affirmation and valuing individuals’ contributions in order to support future creative and cultural engagement

2.0 Community Development Process

Our aim at the beginning of the project was to research and talk to as many different community gatekeepers as possible, building trust relationships with up to 10 groups initially and identifying up to 8 of those to go forward with development and creative consultation sessions.
The process began in November 2012 with a small scale project working with local primary schools, the library and Eastwood Nursery and Children’s Centre to create a Christmas Lantern Procession on the green, funded by Wandsworth Arts Team. We then ran a short youth consultancy project from January – March 2013, funded by Wandsworth Public Health, which used street arts to enable 15-20 year olds to explore their current and future relationships with their built environment and local community through a series of creative activities. During this period we also contacted as many other local organisations as possible.

Key contacts and organisations consulted with in Roehampton during the project period include:

- Alton Estate Residents’ Associations – through Janine Newton, Resident Participation Officer
- Avant-Gardening, socially engaged arts and environment charity working on the Alton Estate to promote locally led groups and activities
- Café Joy – café on Danebury Avenue which aims to support local community activity
- Eastwood Children’s Centre, including Parents Voice, an independent parents’ representatives group
- Eastwood Nursery
- Heathmere Primary School
- Minstead Gardens Sheltered Housing Scheme
- Regenerate – locally based youth charity
- Roehampton Football Academy
- Roehampton Library
- Roehampton Methodist Church
- Roehampton Rocks, a new youth and community arts organisation and network run by local artist Orode Faka
- Sacred Heart Primary School
- Vivacious Dance – new dance company run by local artist Eva Percy
- Youth Services including
  - Roehampton Connexions Base
  - Roehampton Youth Centre

During the process we identified four local groups to work with on events for the Wandsworth Arts Festival. The smaller number of groups than originally aimed for was partly due to budget constraints and feeling that more sessions with fewer groups was a better use of available funds, ensuring that residents had a meaningful engagement with the project. However, we also found that the number of active groups locally outside of statutory services is very low, and our timescale and resources did not permit setting up new groups from scratch. Those we worked with were as follows:

**Eastwood Children’s Centre Toy Library:** a drop in session at Eastwood Children’s Centre which takes place on most mornings and afternoons for parents and their 0-5 year old children. Parents who attend the group were interested in exploring music and dance.

Approximately 66 parents and children engaged with sessions during the course of the project.

**Eastwood Children’s Centre Women’s Group:** a support group for women who have experienced domestic violence. Trained workers and a crèche are provided. The women in the group were
keen to take part in creative activities, improving their own skills and creating something which would be fun for their own children and others from around the estate to take part in.

10 women attended sessions.

**Young people:** Our feedback from the youth consultancy project told us that young people locally aged 15-20 felt strongly that there were not enough positive activities or facilities for them on the estate. They had also enjoyed using street arts as a tool to allow them to express their relationship with the local area.

We worked with approximately 40 young people during these sessions.

**Minstead Gardens Sheltered Housing Scheme:** a regular elders’ Art Group, who were keen to get involved in creating artwork to dress the site, and to ensure that activities were accessible to those with restricted mobility. We also met a number of adults with learning disabilities involved in another group who met at the same time and who joined in the workshops!

20 elders and approximately 8 members of the learning disability group took part in sessions.

### 3.0 Artistic Process and Planning

After initial discussions with group leaders and members, each group was paired with an Emergency Exit Arts artist, and creative development sessions took place to decide on the skills which the group were interested in exploring and/or the desired activity or event to be created for the Festival.

At Eastwood Children’s Centre Toy Library, after a consultation session with visual artist and musician Nick Cattermole, it was agreed that the group would create a percussive musical instrument, with sessions aimed to parents understand more about the benefits of both structured and unstructured music making with very small children.

We paired the women’s group with dancer and visual artist Manuela Benini, who found on visiting them that they were particularly interested in design and costume. Some said they had not had the opportunity to get involved in art since their own school days. The group agreed they would create a pop-up portrait booth where visitors could have their photo taken.

Street artist Alex Evans ran our sessions for the youth consultancy project and his Nano-World techniques had already proved popular with participants from this stage of the project. These
techniques involved juxtaposing miniaturised people, signs or Lounge themed dolls house furniture against the local natural and urban environment.

Using the initial idea of an outdoor sitting room, Natasha Cossey worked with the elders from Minstead Gardens to design The Lounge. Comfortable and plentiful seating was important, and activities such as board games, books to read and biscuits to eat.

In all sessions, artists worked closely with participants to respond to their personal interests and needs, develop early ideas to enable them to be innovative, try new things and develop new skills, and to consider with them how activities and events could be created which could be enjoyed by the wider community.

4.0 Project Delivery

The Lounge was project managed by producer Bridget Floyer, with creative direction from EEA’s Associate Director for Participation Chloe Osborne, and creative facilitation and community development by artists Tash Cossey, Alex Evans, Manuela Benini and Nick Cattermole. Every artist involved ensured that they not only created something in response to what their group wanted to see but also that participants were engaged with the making and shaping of events.

Nick ran five sessions with the Toy Library to both create the instrument and encourage parents and children to play and experiment with it. The instrument was created using second hand kitchen equipment collected by the group such as baking trays, pans and plastic bottles suspended from a wooden frame at ground level, all aimed at illustrating how easy, cheap and enjoyable it can be to make music with children from even a very early age.

“Feedback from the families has been very positive for the whole project.” – Vicky Piggott, Senior Health Visitor, Eastwood Children’s Centre

Manuela worked with the Women’s Group over four sessions to create a pop-up portrait booth. They used printing techniques to create beautiful portrait frames and designed 2D props in black and white such as a microphone, headphones, balloons, handbag, moustache etc which could be played with to create striking images. The women enjoyed making something which they would be able to bring their children along to and said that their involvement had hugely enhanced their well being.

“Being involved with the EEA art project was uplifting… it was great to be part of a community project and having the chance to be creative. Things like this are good for the soul and go a long way into good well being. Things like this should happen more often!” – Women’s Group member

We offered two more street art sessions for young people, using Roehampton Base as a location. Youth workers were impressed at how engaged the young people were with the activities and they created some fantastic images, though participants varied from session to session so teaching accessible and easy to learn skills was important.

At Minstead Gardens, residents created bunting and other materials to dress the site over two sessions and came up with the idea of a tombola with prizes, which developed into a teapot of
stories and letters collected in Roehampton and taken up to the Shimmy on the final day of the Festival.

The time period and development therefore possible with members of the community proved too limited to train a community ‘media team’. This would be a next step we would be interested in pursuing in future projects. We tapped into resident association noticeboards, local shops and many email contacts as well as through partner agencies to advertise opportunities to get involved as well as the events for the Festival itself but a team of volunteers on the ground would be the most effective way of ensuring wide publicity and effective reach.

Developing trust relationships in a community is a slow burn process and all involved felt that while workshop sessions were very positive, the project would ideally have been able to give more time and a longer lead in process for developing relationships with group members and fomenting ideas before the pressure of creating end product for the Wandsworth Arts Festival started to come into play. Having said this, the Festival gave a natural focus and sense of purpose to the activities and a fantastic chance for residents to share what they had created with others from around the borough.

5.0 Artistic Outcomes

The Lounge programme resulted in four artistic outcomes as part of Wandsworth Arts Festival:

**Street Arts Academy – the Alton Estate, Sat 4 May**
A street arts session using the Nano-World photography techniques developed during the youth consultancy project to create live art interventions in and around the Alton Estate, creating unexpected images of young people and other residents.

Street Arts Academy engaged with approximately 30 residents around the Alton Estate.

**The Lounge – Roehampton Library Green, Sat 11 May**
An outdoor sitting room with sofas, armchairs, lampshades, books – even a mobile armchair rickshaw! - bringing together work created by all the local residents involved in the project. The Lounge included:

- Bunting made by Minstead Gardens residents
- Activities, decorations and biscuits chosen by Minstead Gardens residents
- The musical instrument created by the Toy Library
• The pop up photo booth with props created by the Women’s Group
• Photos created by the young people, including miniaturised figures and a miniature Lounge hidden amongst the life-sized furniture
• Nano-World props for live creation of images by visitors
• A playlist of songs chosen by members of all groups
• An invitation for visitors to create a drawing, letter or story for the tombola

“This is the first time I have seen anything like this- can we have more of the same please?” - Visitor to the Lounge

The Lounge was visited by 136 people including at least 34 previous participants in workshops.

The Fire Garden – Roehampton Library Green, Sat 11 May
A spectacular evening fire garden, including fire pots, vines, a rain of fire, fire dancer, DJ and low level pyrotechnics. The fire garden attracted not only visitors to the green but also a number of local residents who watched from their balconies. It ended with music (again chosen by local residents) and an invitation to dance – and even we were taken by surprise when a spontaneous conga line developed!

“It makes you feel like the place you live has a lot more to offer than you realised...who’d have thought that you could make a fire garden here!”- Audience member at the Fire Garden

The Fire Garden was watched by 122 people including 26 residents watching from balconies.

The Lounge at the Shimmy - St Mary’s Church Square, Putney, Sun 19 May
The Roehampton Lounge was taken up to Church Square as part of the final day of Wandsworth Arts Festival, beginning the trail from Putney Bridge through to Wandsworth Park. The Lounge at the Shimmy incorporated most of the activities created in Roehampton and included a tombola prize draw. Visitors who drew a ticket either won a message from Roehampton – the letters, drawings and stories created the weekend before – or a dance, a song or a poem. Our professional artists, including poet and writer Arji Manuelpillai, local Roehampton dancer Eva Percy, and OuterGlobe musicians Lanre, Adelaide McKenzie, and performance poet Errol McGlashan, created bespoke one-on-one or small scale ‘living room sessions’ for visitors, singing a song, creating or performing a poem, or teaching simple dance steps.

“It feels like we are connected to the people that made it, I like that their photos are here”
“A truly awesome event for the children. Lots of interactive events and fun. Kids loved it!”
– Visitors to the Shimmy

The Lounge at the Shimmy was visited by approximately 267 people.

6.0 Partnerships

Wandsworth Arts Team and the Wandsworth Arts Festival 2013
To be part of the Wandsworth Arts Festival provided an extremely positive focus for the project and a real sense of occasion and excitement for participants. However, there was an tension between balancing the desire to maintain real agency and decision making powers for local residents and the slow paced, necessarily flexible nature of this work, with very different timescale
and logistical requirements attendant on being involved in a much bigger Festival. For example, our headline event – intended to be programmed by residents - needed to be decided on and advertised in the Festival brochure just as our initial community development process was finishing and as we were only just beginning the consultation process with some groups. There was therefore very little input from them on this.

A much longer lead in time and space for a clearly staged process of creative fermentation, followed by decision making, followed by a realisation process including skills development and workshops, would allow timescales to become better matched, while still ensuring local interest and engagement was maintained right up to the Festival period.

**Local service providers**

- Eastwood Children’s Centre: manage and host the Toy Library and Women’s Group. As part of those groups, provided in-kind space, workers, and refreshments.
- Minstead Gardens Sheltered Housing Scheme: run the weekly Art group, as part of which they provided in-kind space, worker and refreshments.
- Youth Services: run Roehampton Base and Youth Centre. Provided the use of their spaces and some support with communications with young people, through groups and individually.

We were really pleased with the range of people from around the estate who we were able to engage with through our partners, their enthusiasm for the project, and the evidence of need for more of this kind of work in the area. Our feedback from all partners was extremely positive. Getting reliable communications with and support from local providers was however often tricky, with an understandable lack of faith that it was worth investing in a long term relationship with us, due to their previous experience of the short term nature of previous similar projects. Our association with the Council also sometimes worked for but usually against us in this respect. To work with and through local services was essential to the project for ensuring real reach and continuity for participants, and there was clear mutual benefit. However a longer term presence on the Alton estate, and clearer partnership agreements for future work outlining mutual expectations in advance, would help to ensure trust, good communications and understanding.

**7.0 Future Development and Sustainability**

Our community development process and the ongoing building of relationships in the area has strengthened our belief that it is important that The Lounge is not a one-off, but the start of an ongoing and sustainable programme of arts development work in Roehampton.

The relatively short time scale for the project in 2012/13 meant that it was difficult to build trust relationships – as local services and groups are so used to arts organisations coming in over a short period of time and disappearing again – and to ensure that all events were created with real input from residents. A longer period would ensure they were skilled and empowered not only to be participants but for some to take that next step to help us run and deliver activities for others.

A successful strategy for sustainable community development in Roehampton would involve:

- A longer term strategy for a programme running over two to three years, so that trust relationships can be developed and real inroads made into local networks, with partnerships and events building from year to year.
• An ability to sustain our presence in the area (attending local meetings, developing relationships and exploring future funding and partnership opportunities) between pots of funding to ensure relationships are not lost.

• Earlier confirmation of funding for event outcomes which would allow us time to raise matched funding from trusts and foundations and other sources for greater community involvement and development.

• A gradual upskilling, support and empowerment of local groups and artists, currently working at a range of levels, who could sustain arts events in the area beyond the end of the programme. We have already discovered range of artists and groups who we would be interested in developing our relationships with further:
  - Orode Faka, director of Roehampton Rocks
  - Eva Percy, local dancer who has formed community dance company Vivacious Dance
  - Roehampton Library’s knitting group
  - A Saturday Art Club for parents and children