

A-MUSE

An Evaluation for BEEE Creative

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Executive Summary

Introduction

A-MUSE was designed as a programme of fun dance workshops based on the belief of the positive impact dance engagement can have on people's lives. Led by BEEE Creative artists the workshops were aimed at older adults & young families. They were held in two North Hertfordshire museums – Stevenage and Royston from September 2018 – August 2019. The workshops were targeted at families at Stevenage and Royston, and over 55s at Royston.

Project Overview

The workshops aimed to support the needs of the museums and their localities. The sessions were designed to offer creative dance movement activities and were responsive to the participants' needs and inputs.

At Royston Museum workshops were held twice a month from September to December 2018, this settled into a pattern of one per week from January. There were two workshops each time, one aimed at those aged 55+ and the other aimed at families with pre-school aged children.

At Stevenage Museum one three-hour workshop was held on a monthly basis for three months. These were targeted at families, for all age groups. Feedback from participants and potential participants was that the age range was too broad and that the day of the week they were held – Saturdays – was not ideal. Therefore, the workshops were split into two shorter sessions, with each session aimed at a smaller age range: one for families with pre-school aged children, and one for families with children aged 5+. The workshops were moved away from Saturdays and still held monthly.

Headline Findings

- The anticipated number of workshops were delivered, except two that were cancelled due to the weather
- Fewer than anticipated participants took part, however mitigating plans were enacted that did increase some participation
- Three quarters of the Stevenage participants came from areas in the 5th decile of multiple deprivation, or higher¹
- Using self-identification methods most of the over 55 participants indicated feelings of loneliness and isolation that were reduced as a result of taking part
- All of the respondents indicated they had learned new skills or increased physical wellbeing
- Family respondents identified feeling more connected to their families
- Family and over 55 respondents identified feeling more connected with their community
- Partnerships with museums was strengthened, both museums wish to continue to work with BEEE Creative
- A model of self-funding was not established, however barriers to this have been identified and require further exploration

Recommendations

Museum communication: There were challenges with aligning museum booking and BEEE Creative booking participants. There were also some operational challenges in some weeks at one of the museums. It is recommended some strategies to address these specific challenges are developed.

Timing and structure: Consider different approaches to different museums, and groups, regarding timing and structure that will support the recruitment and retention participants.

¹ Deprivation indices by postcode as indicated by the Index of Multiple Deprivation using Government Open Data from 2015. Found at: <http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/idmap.html>

Introduction

A-MUSE was designed to be a programme of fun dance workshops, led by BEEE Creative artists, bringing older adults & young families together in Hertfordshire museums from September 2018 – August 2019. It focused its work on two museums in North Hertfordshire; Stevenage and Royston, offering participant-led creative dance workshops in both museums. At Stevenage these workshops were targeted at families. At Royston two separate workshops were targeted at older adults and families. The workshops have been developed based on the belief in the positive impact dance engagement has on peoples' lives, specifically, on health and well-being. These outcomes have been demonstrated through the evaluation of previous BEEE Creative projects working with families and older people.

Project Overview

The workshops aimed to support the needs of the museums and their localities. The sessions were designed to offer creative dance movement activities and were responsive to the participants' needs and inputs.

At Royston Museum workshops were held twice a month from September to December 2018, this settled into a pattern of one per week from January. There were two workshops each time, one aimed at those aged 55+ and the other aimed at families with pre-school aged children.

At Stevenage Museum one three-hour workshop was held on monthly basis from September to December 2018. These were targeted at families, for all age groups. Feedback from participants and potential participants was that the age range was too broad and that the day of the week they were held – Saturdays – was not ideal. Therefore, a decision was made to still hold the workshops but to split the age group; one for families with pre-school aged children, and one for families with children aged 5+. The workshops were still held monthly and the shorter sessions still totalled three hours per month. The sessions were also moved away from Saturdays.

Headline findings

A-MUSE achieved most of its intended outcomes. Where outcomes were not realised in their entirety, learning from the challenges has been used both within the life of this project and for potential future projects.

- The anticipated number of workshops were delivered, except two that were cancelled due to the weather
- Fewer than anticipated participants took part, however mitigating plans were enacted that did increase participation
- Three quarters of the Stevenage participants came from areas in the 5th decile of multiple deprivation, or higher²
- Using self-identification methods most of the over 55 participants indicated feelings of loneliness and isolation that were reduced as a result of taking part
- All of the respondents indicated they had learned new skills or increased physical wellbeing
- Family participants identified feeling more connected to their families
- Family and over 55 participants identified feeling more connected with their community
- Partnerships with museums was strengthened with both museums wishing to continue to work with BEEE Creative
- A model of self-funding was not established, however barriers to this have been identified and require further exploration

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Aims and Outcomes

The delivery model of the project was simple, but its aims were ambitious. Its ethos was to place participants as active collaborators, providing a sense of ownership and connection, while animating museum spaces. It had a number of aims.

Aim: To promote community and personal wellbeing

Outcomes:

1. Participants identify increases in individual wellbeing – through active collaboration, being active, being creative, learning new skills and connecting with others
2. Families identify increases in connections within the family

Aim: To challenge barriers to traditional entry points to dance and cultural offers

Outcomes:

1. 50 % of participants meet criteria for vulnerability – e.g. socio-economic, disability
2. Strategies for reaching vulnerable participants and removing barriers to taking part are developed

Aim: To develop sustainable engagement that continues beyond the funding period

Outcomes:

1. A self-funding model is developed by the end of the project
2. Participants establish regular pattern of attendance
3. Participants are willing to make a financial contribution to the workshops
4. Museums are willing to continue to host the workshops

Project Personnel

Project Management – Carrie Washington, BEEE Creative CIC

Dance Practitioners – Carrie Washington, Hannah Delaney

Project Partners

Stevenage Museum

Royston Museum

Outputs

The table below (Fig.1) illustrates the anticipated outputs and the delivered outputs

Fig.1

Anticipated Output	Delivered Output
• 30 workshops for adults aged 55+ (Royston)	• 29 workshops for adults aged 55+ (Royston) ³
• 30 workshops for families (Royston)	• 29 workshops for families (Royston)
• 12 half day workshops for families (Stevenage)	• 4 half day workshops for families (Stevenage) • 14 shorter workshops for families (Stevenage)
• 12 older adults per workshop (360 participations)	• 82 adult participations (Royston)
• 18 participants per family workshop – Royston (540 participations)	• 303 family participations (Royston)
• 18 participants per family workshops – Stevenage (216)	• 72 family participations (Stevenage)
• Total participations – 1116	• 457 total participations

³ One workshop session for older adults, and families at Royston had to be cancelled due to snow

Methodology

The workshops were free and while participants were encouraged to attend regularly it was anticipated that not all participants would return for each and every session. Therefore, a more 'light-touch' approach was adopted, with a reliance on practitioner feedback for each session and some milestone planning.

Formative

- Attendance monitoring of each individual participant to develop a picture of sustained engagement
- Demographic monitoring of each individual participant
- Practitioners were asked to complete a session feedback after each session, this included observations of participants, self-reflection of their practice, challenges, successes and forward planning
- Interviews with participants where possible

Follow up

- End of project feedback from participants (including from those who stopped attending throughout the year)
- Feedback from partner museums
- Feedback from practitioners

What Happened

While some comparisons to both venues can be made they do need to be approached separately when considering attendance and sustainability. This is due to a number of factors:

- Participant demographics – Both Stevenage and Royston did deliver workshops to families with pre-school children. However, the other workshop participants were very different; over 55s in Royston, families with 5+ aged children in Stevenage
- The starting point of the workshops – Royston had groups who already had experience of engaging with creative dance workshops so the A-MUSE workshops were able to build on that base. While Stevenage did have some participants who had engaged before, most participants had not engaged regularly, if at all. However, some of the Stevenage families had strong engagement history with the museum's other activities and events.

Comparisons can be made however when considering the participant outcomes regarding wellbeing and connection.

Participants

Participants became aware of the workshops either from previous experience with the museums or BEEE Creative. Facebook and word of mouth were the main sources for participants to find out about the workshops.

Attendance

At the start of the workshops, attendance figures across each workshop group was patchy. Some of the workshops had no attendees and others started well (Stevenage) but declined soon after. Mitigating plans were put in place, such as separating the age groups in Stevenage and working with museums to improve communications, bookings and promotion. Once the workshops had settled into a routine, numbers for the families and over 55s at Royston remained generally consistent, with a similar scenario for Stevenage. The most popular sessions were for the Royston families. There were some issues with the booking system at one of the museums: *50% no show - so only 3 families. Problematic when there are so many who may not have got a place because system will have shown as fully booked.*

In terms of individual participants and their attendance patterns, there were a core group in each workshop group who developed a reasonably regular attendance pattern. This was supplemented by other participants attending, but with less regularity. This did impact the workshop leaders, who had to ensure

they were able to plan for and adapt to fluctuating attendance each week. For example, the Royston families workshop saw a fluctuation of 10 participants one week, 27 the following and 14 the week after.

Feedback from participants on what prevented them from participating regularly was not taken. However, assumptions include the timing of the sessions and who they are aimed at. This is supported somewhat by the change in participation figures after the Stevenage sessions were restructured. Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the groups that regular attendance is challenging. *Home schooled children have not got the same routine everyday.* (Practitioner feedback).

Reasons for Taking Part

The participants were asked why they attended the workshops. The most popular responses included:

- Have fun
- Be active
- Do something different
- Dance

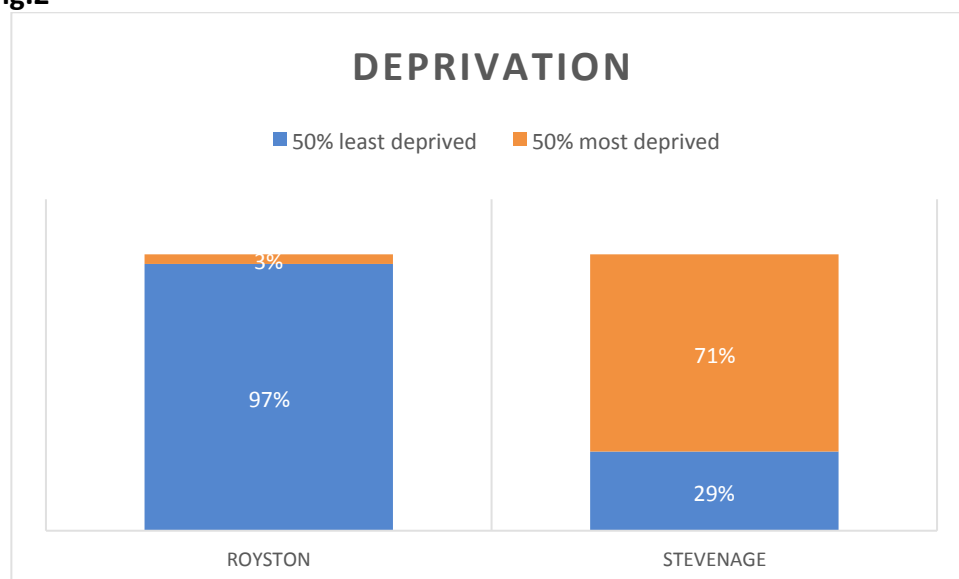
About half responded that a reason for taking part was that it was free.

Postcodes

An ambition of the project was to engage with at least 50% participants who meet criteria for vulnerability. Postcode data was collected for most of the participants. This data was analysed using <http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk> a government tool that enables the search for any postcode in the UK. It returns a result in decile percentages ranging from the 10% least deprived to the 10% most deprived. The data is from 2015.

Analysis of the postcodes of the participants (Fig.2) illustrates that in Royston, almost all of the participants were in the 50% least deprived areas in the country, with 11 participants in the 10% least deprived. However, in Stevenage three quarters were in the 50% most deprived areas in the country, with two participants in the 30% most deprived. This is unsurprising as Royston as a whole is relatively affluent (according to the data) with no areas below 40% least deprived. Stevenage, however, has multiple areas of deprivation including two areas in the 10% most deprived category.

Fig.2



Using this data alone, this would indicate that A-MUSE was successful in reaching 50% or more vulnerable participants in Stevenage but not in Royston. However, vulnerability factors can also include age and isolation, with the older adults falling into this category.

BEEE Creative aimed to develop strategies to reach vulnerable groups, with some success. In order to reach potential participants their marketing included sending the information out as widely as possible to places such as children's centres, schools and nurseries. Online the information was shared via Facebook, partners' networks, websites and listings (online and paper). Feedback from BEEE Creative of the predominant way people heard was through social media and word of mouth. BEEE Creative also raised the issue that while word of mouth and social media were good conduits of information it does not support those who are lonely and/or isolated as they are unlikely to be connected to these networks.

Outcomes

Family participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire at the end of the series of the workshops. Nine responses were recorded. These responses were on behalf of family members representing 22 participants in total. Participants from the over 55s group were also asked to respond to a questionnaire but only one response was returned. However, interviews with participants from this group were undertaken so their views have been heard.

Increased wellbeing

It was anticipated that an outcome of participating was to see increases in individual wellbeing. Indicators for this were collaboration, being active, being creative, learning new skills and connecting with others. The participants were asked about each of these elements in the questionnaires and in the interviews.

Creativity and Collaboration

Almost all of the family respondents felt they had a say in the activities and were able to actively collaborate with facilitators and each other. One participant stated in response to the question, 'What did you enjoy about the workshops?' *Extremely enjoyed the chance to dance, move freely, have a choice on what we did and the great leadership of the workshop*

This was echoed by the responses from the over 55s group, who also enjoyed the collaborative approach.

Coupled with collaboration comes creativity and all respondents felt they were able to be creative in the workshops. Some referenced the benefits of the workshops being held in a museum where they were able to interact with and interpret the collections. *I like the museum, you spot things. I like to go up the stairs and look at the paintings.* One of the over 55s participants joined because of the creative element of the workshops: *I prefer the creative input rather than trying to follow what somebody's set.*

Being active

The participants were asked if the workshops helped keep them active. All of the family respondents agreed that the workshop did do this. There was also agreement for the over 55s who enjoyed that the workshops allowed for physical activity. One participant said: *It keeps the body moving. It's nice to find something for over 50s. At our pace.*

The families also appreciated the ability to be active and share that experience:

- *It got my daughter dancing and moving, and interacting with others, and she loved it.*
- *I loves making up a dance move and being active*

Learning new skills

The participants were asked if they felt they had learned any new skills. The family respondents all agreed that they had learned new skills although none gave specific examples of skills they had learned. The over 55s group also felt they had developed skills. They particularly mentioned increasing their balance, co-ordination, memory and reaction times. One participant felt that coming to the workshops had helped her in other areas of her life, such as driving. She felt that the workshops helped keep her reaction times sharp which she needs for driving: *When one's driving as one gets older one thing that goes is their quick thinking. Coming here has helped in other areas, like my response times.* Others talked about some of the

exercises they have learned in the workshops and that they do them at home to keep them working on their balance and co-ordination.

Increased connections

An anticipated outcome of the workshops was increased connections for participants. For the families, it was hoped that they would feel more connected to their families, and to the community. For the over 55s it was hoped they would feel more connected with other participants and the community.

Of the nine respondents, six felt they were closer to their families as a result of taking part. A number of respondents referenced this in their comments on what their children enjoyed about the workshops:

- *She enjoyed dancing with me*
- *Looking round the museum, dancing with their mum, friendly teacher*

The families and over 55s were asked if they felt closer to the community as a result of taking part. Four of the family respondents indicated they felt closer to their community as a result of the workshops. Most of the over 55s responded that they felt closer. The majority of the group did not know each other before they joined and they felt they had developed closer connections. One participant said: *The first time I came the three of us sat down and the amount of intimate detail that came out was astonishing. We'd never met each other before but we were talking about very sensitive things, because we'd been dancing together.* They felt this translated to how they would be in the community, with one saying: *Being in the community – I see you in the street I will say hello to you.*

The increased connections for the over 55s also impacted on their feelings of loneliness. The group are active members of the community but many live alone. They were open in discussing that when they go home, they will often not speak to anyone until they leave the house again. They felt that these workshops gave them a reason to get dressed that day and leave the house.

- *I live in a flat. When the door is shut and that's it. Nobody visits, no conversation at all.*
- *This is welcome. It gets me out of the house. It makes me get dressed. I get dressed in something decent. If I was just at home I would just put on a pair of extremely ancient jogging bottoms.*

Financial contributions

The participants were all asked if they would be willing to pay for each workshop, and if so, how much they would be willing to pay. Everyone responded that they would be willing to pay for the workshops with what they would pay ranging from £1 - £5 per workshop. For the families most were willing to pay £2-£3 per workshop, with the over 55s happy to pay £5. It is likely families had a lower threshold due to having to pay for more than once participant each week.

A self-funding model is not yet within reach for this project. Feedback from BEEE Creative cites two key reasons. Firstly, the size of the space limits the numbers of participants which inevitably increases the per head costs. This is exacerbated in the sessions for pre-schoolers. Many have younger siblings who come with more 'stuff' (buggies, bags, clothes etc) that takes up more space, yet a charge cannot be levied for the babies. Secondly, the participants want time to chat afterwards. While this is a positive in terms of increasing social connections and reducing isolation, it impacts on costs attributed to artists and how long they are contracted to work for each session. This project has been successful in highlighting these issues.

Museums

The museums were asked how the workshops supported their aims and if they would be willing to host future workshops. They stated they would be happy to continue to work in partnership with BEEE Creative on this (and other) projects:

- *Yes- it represents a valuable opportunity to engage an often-overlooked sector of the community in Museum work. (Royston)*

- *Yes, because the quality of the experience for the participants is amazing, the young people love it!*
(Stevenage)

Stevenage went further to praise the work of BEEE Creative as a project partner and for the experience it brings to the museum: *Thank you for all the work that goes in to making such a great project, the fundraising, the planning, the recording and evaluation, and above all the actual days with young people participating, a highlight of our year!*

They felt that hosting the workshops helped them achieve their aims. Specifically, they said:

- *Supporting this work strengthened our ability to meet our outcomes and goals of enriching our local community. We have also been able to provide better access to our collections through this project.*
(Royston)

Royston could see improvements for future work was finding ways to support participants to engage with other opportunities at the museum: *We hope to design a way to encourage project attendees to engage with other groups and offerings from the Museum.* Stevenage echoed the issues around timing and competition for space as something that would need to be addressed in the future: *Timing is tricky for us - we'd love to keep on being involved, so thinking about the timing would help, for example we are often quieter over Easter, so that would be a good holiday to aim for.* Stevenage Museum already offers a number of engagement opportunities for young people, including Home Schooled and Young Carers. They suggested working with established groups may support the museum experience of those groups, as well as support recruitment. *We learnt that a group that already exists gives a more cohesive experience for the young people, no need for new relationships at short notice.*

Conclusion

A-MUSE did meet its aims in providing accessible creative dance workshops for families and older people living in Royston and Stevenage. It achieved its desired outcomes of increasing the wellbeing of its participants, mainly through its creative and collaborative approach, and the opportunities to connect in different ways with family and the community.

It aimed for at least 50% of its participants to meet criteria for vulnerability. It achieved this in Stevenage based on postcode data alone. In Royston it can be argued it was more challenging to achieve this due to the socio-economic landscape of the area. However, it did engage a number of older people who self-identified as lonely.

It hoped to develop a model of self-funding. While this did not happen, it was able to test the appetite for participants to pay for workshops and what they felt they could pay. This information can be used for planning future activities and projects.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made should this work continue in the future:

Museum communication

Challenges were raised regarding aligning museum booking and BEEE Creative booking, causing confusion and a loss of potential participants. Additionally, there were some operational challenges in some weeks at one of the museums. This may be a challenging issue to mitigate but it is recommended some strategies to address these specific challenges are developed.

Timing and structure

Consider different approaches to different museums, and groups, regarding timing and structure that will support the recruitment and retention participants.