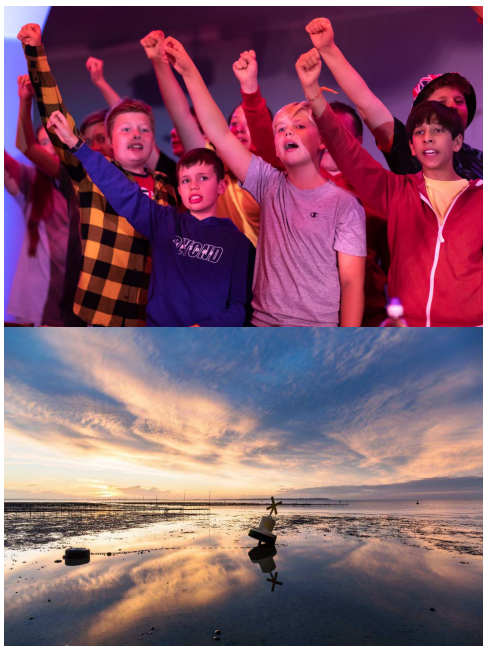




Swale Youth Voice Project, 2023

Consultation Findings



Susan Potter
Arts Evaluation and Research

July 2023



ROYAL
OPERA
HOUSE
BRIDGE



ICON

"There are teachers in every school across Swale who want this but just don't have the support. They desperately want arts and cultural activity to happen. They don't however want reams of paperwork to make things happen. They don't want to pay £500 a year for events. They want a minibus to take their kids to the theatre or the money and ideas to bring the arts into school. They need help while the children need aspirations!"

Swale Youth Voice Project Consultee, May 2023

"We open the school from 9am to 3pm. Today you worked with our more able students but there is a scale with far higher needs. For our parents, that six hours is a break. As an SEND school, we provide a crucial service to families with really serious needs. When we offer opportunities for extra-curricular stuff there is such a big demand for them. If it's safe and enjoyable, it's going to be filled. There is a huge amount of scope for more creative weekend and holiday activities, for our students and also, for their families."

Swale Youth Voice Project Consultee, May 2023

"The biggest barrier for us as teachers is that the core subjects always take priority. This means that arts subjects get less curriculum time and are perceived as less important by Senior Leaders, as their focus is very much towards English and the STEM subjects. Although there can be some fantastic arts links made to these, they often get dismissed if they don't support an exam board's requirements or planned scheme of learning."

Swale Youth Voice Project Consultee, May 2023

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Acknowledgements

ICON would like to thank those who have given their time, skills and resources to ensure the successful delivery of the Swale Youth Voice Project. Thanks are also due to those participant children and young people, partner organisations and community members who have shared their experiences, insights and experiences via interviews, questionnaires and discussions in support of the consultation process.

Susan Potter is grateful for the advice and support provided by the following individuals, in the collection of data and preparation of this report.

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Sheppey FM Radio Club, Sheerness
Sittingbourne Youth Club, Sittingbourne
St Mary of Charity C of E Primary School, Faversham
Tunstall C of E Primary School, Sittingbourne
West Faversham Community Association, Faversham



1 Background and context

Culture is an essential ingredient for a fulfilling and richly rewarding life. Creativity helps us to see the world differently and understand our place within it. A rich cultural heritage builds a sense of who we are and where we are from, affirms our identity and helps us to build both resilience and self-esteem. The county of Kent which is largely rural and extensively coastal, has internationally important arts and heritage, post-industrial estuary towns and inspirational cultural landscapes, all of which contribute to a distinctive offer. The county is the UK's gateway to Europe and with its unique location between mainland Europe and London, is well positioned to maintain and grow an international outlook.

The region is currently on the edge of significant change; during the next decade the Kent and Medway population will increase by just over a quarter. This will require significant housing and infrastructure growth. The county is characterised by some notable highlights with emerging companies alongside comparatively small and geographically dispersed creative clusters. In order to fulfil its' potential and play a nationally significant role, Kent County Council (KCC), will need to build on these to establish greater critical mass and strengthen its' collective voice.

KCC believes culture is a key driver for the prosperity of the county. The creative economy is one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK. The digital and creative industries are highlighted by government as a priority for growth and the region has much to contribute. By 2027, Kent aspires to be a confident, vibrant county, where extraordinary cultural activity is available to both enrich and transform the lives of those who visit, reside or work in the county. Published by KCC in 2017, the Kent Cultural Strategy sets out the ambitions for culture to become a part of everyone's daily life, with more people engaging with, experiencing and being inspired by high quality arts.

The Kent Cultural Strategy aims to create a place where:

- Investment in creativity and innovation ensures that entrepreneurs and extraordinary cultural practitioners choose to invest, live and work in Kent
- Enchanting, surprising and innovative things happen within and across the county
- Diversity in all its forms is celebrated and thrives
- Transformative cultural product, achieved through collaboration and ambitious, resourceful cultural planning, is recognised nationally and internationally.

The strategy has been shaped by Kent's cultural sector and local authorities. It aims to strengthen collaborative work across these and other partnerships including the private sector, the third sector and the public sector. KCC believes the cultural and creative industries should be encouraged to recognise opportunities, enabling significant economic growth for Kent while working with local people to embed culture into the fabric of society. Importantly, the strategy recognises a commitment to cultural provision for all children and young people (CYP), through the following key ambitions:

- i. Ensure that all CYP in Kent have access to high quality culture from an early age and on their own terms.
- ii. Enable CYP to become respected as commissioners, curators and producers of culture, as much as they are audiences and participants.
- iii. Promote cultural learning with improved careers guidance and vocational learning opportunities to develop employability, social and creative skills.



2 Swale Youth Voice Project

Swale is a local authority borough of Kent, bounded by Medway to the west, Canterbury to the east, Ashford to the south and Maidstone to the south west. Swale Borough Council is based in Sittingbourne. The district is named after the narrow channel called 'The Swale', separating the mainland of Kent from the Isle of Sheppey, now occupying the central part of the district. It was formed in 1974 under the Local Government Act 1972, from the Borough of Faversham; the Borough of Queenborough-in-Sheppey; Sittingbourne and Milton Urban District; and Swale Rural District. Most of the southern half of the Borough lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, whilst Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey form the concluding part of the Thames Gateway growth area. There are four main towns in the Borough: Sittingbourne and Faversham on the mainland, and Sheerness and Queenborough on Sheppey.

Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs) were launched by Arts Council England (ACE) in October 2015, in order to meet the Cultural Education Challenge. LCEPs are innovative partnerships between cultural providers, educational institutions and local authorities to improve cultural provision for children and young people in their town, city, county or region. Cultural Education Partnerships (CEPs) are flexible and are able respond to local needs and circumstances. To be effective, they should comprise as wide a range as possible of arts, cultural and heritage providers, music education hubs, schools, higher education institutions, local authorities and employers. They aim to take the long view, planning for the future and seeking to make sustainable change in their communities. The Swale CEP strives to be youth led and is inspired by the ethos of the successful ART31 programme led by the Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury, which takes its name from Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child, stating that '*Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities*'.

Swale Cultural Education Partnership (CEP), includes invited cultural and education organisations whose work aligns with the ACE Cultural Education Challenge quality principles and aims to:

- i. Ensure access to a high quality, diverse, creative and cultural education (formal and informal) for all young people in Swale; in particular for those who are disadvantaged or historically under-represented.
- ii. Enable young people to progress through high quality creative and cultural learning experiences, following learning pathways that will help develop skills, raise aspirations, and increase employability.
- iii. Enable children and young people in Swale to become active co-creators in the development of their creative and cultural learning.
- iv. Enable young people to engage in arts and cultural learning to increase their mental wellbeing, in particular those who are not able to access traditional mental health services.

In summer 2023, Swale CEP and Kent County Council commissioned ICON to deliver a programme of consultation with CYP of all ages and abilities across Swale, focusing on areas of deprivation and/ or low engagement in arts and cultural activity. The consultation will contribute to a refinement of the Kent Cultural Strategy, while providing data for the continued work of the emerging Swale CEP. The consultation includes young residents of areas with high indices of multiple deprivation, LGBTQIA+ young people, CYP from traveller communities and those with additional/ special educational needs and disabilities. Participant consultees range from 2 to 25 years.

The consultation process set out to explore the following themes of enquiry:

- Children and young people's perception of arts and culture in Swale
- Children and young people's engagement in arts and cultural activity in Swale
- The barriers to access and participation in arts and cultural activities in Swale
- A sense of how education provides – or might better provide – an enriched cultural life for children and young people in Swale.

Through a programme of participatory drama workshops, small group discussions and individual interviews, the Swale Youth Voice Project engaged with more than three hundred CYP and twelve partner organisations across Faversham, Sheppey and Sittingbourne. The following sections of this brief report describe the participants, the process and the results of the consultation.

"When I first started out as a teacher there were so many more (and regular!) trips out and visitors to the school. Over time, due to lack of funding, more red tape, greater focus on core subjects and of course COVID, these have dwindled and reduced to be at best a one off occasion in the year or in some cases non-existent. It helps when schools are working towards an Artsmark award, however many schools struggle to be convinced to engage as they don't fit in with the overarching vision, plans or way of teaching."

Swale Youth Voice Project Consultee, May 2023



3 Methodology

The Swale Youth Voice Project took place between May and July 2023, engaging with more than three hundred CYP and twelve partner organisations. The aims of this brief evaluation study are to:

- Report upon the inputs, outputs and outcomes of the consultation process
- Provide a summary of findings to inform ICON, Swale Borough Council and KCC
- Suggest recommendations regarding the development of KCC's Cultural Strategy.

The evaluation comprised the following quantitative and qualitative strands:

- Attendance at five project planning meetings
- Observation and documentation of five consultation events
- Analysis of internal project monitoring data
- Audio recorded interviews conducted with 30 participant CYP
- Evaluation questionnaires completed by 170 participant CYP
- Evaluation questionnaires completed by 10 participant teachers
- In-depth audio recorded interviews conducted with five wider stakeholders.

Through a series of creative and participatory workshops, a wide diversity of children and young people aged between four and twenty-three years were consulted regarding: their perception of current arts and cultural provision in Swale; their engagement in arts and cultural activity locally; the barriers to participation in arts and cultural activity; how education settings provide/ might better provide a more enriched arts and cultural life.

Overarching themes have been analysed, compared and contrasted from each dataset, in order to develop meaning and illuminate the findings. It is hoped that this method follows on clearly from the objectives of the study, providing a robust and holistic evaluation in supporting the development of KCC's Cultural Strategy in 2023 and beyond. The following section of this report presents an overview of the consultation process and workshop delivery for the Swale Youth Voice Project taking place between May and July 2023. The 'word cloud' above meanwhile illustrates some of those activities CYP in Swale currently engage in on a regular basis, yet many of these were reported to take place outside of the area.

4 Overview of project activity

Activity	Inputs and outputs	Learning outcomes
Project planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 x project team members recruited - 7 x participant schools recruited - 5 x community organisations recruited - 10 x planning meetings delivered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - skills required to engage CYP and schools in process - time taken to encourage participation in project - resource required to facilitate consultation process - economic/ geographic diversity included in project
Project delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 14 x consultation workshops delivered - 305 x CYP participants consulted - 10 x teachers/stakeholders consulted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - diversity of groups/ settings engaged in process - CYPs' commitment to participate in process - teachers' commitment to participate in process
Project evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 x consultation workshops observed - 170 x CYP questionnaires completed - 10 x teacher questionnaires completed - 30 x CYP interviews conducted - 5 x teacher/stakeholder interviews conducted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of arts/ cultural awareness amongst CYP - lack of arts/ cultural experience amongst CYP - lack of arts/ cultural infrastructure across Swale - need for sustained/ long term financial investment - need for political commitment from Swale/KCC



5 Description of participants

A brief questionnaire was delivered to participant CYP of eight years and above at the end of the consultation workshops. This survey included items to investigate socio-demographic data (e.g., age, gender, ethnic background, disability status), and items relating to participant experience of arts and culture (e.g., awareness of provision locally; participation in arts and cultural activity; reasons for non-engagement; future aspirations and/ or suggested developments).

If respondents are a representative sample, this data provides a valuable snapshot of the full cohort. A total of 170 individuals completed the survey from 305 participant CYP, indicating a 56% response rate. Of these, 45% survey respondents were in receipt of free school meals. The following sections provide further analyses of responses from the participant CYP:

- Age
- Gender
- Disability
- Ethnicity.



5.1 Age

The questionnaire asked participant CYP 'What is your age group?' Survey data suggests the Swale Youth Voice Project engaged with CYP aged between eight and 25 years. The larger majority were aged '8 to 11 years' (74%); a smaller percentage were aged '12 to 14 years' (17%) or '15 to 16 years' (7%), while a minority respondents were aged '17 years or above' (2%). Since the majority of consultation workshops were delivered to Y4/5 pupils, this data concurs with the primary school age range. In terms of the general population across Swale, the latest census data reports the average (median) age of Swale increased by one year, from 40 to 41 years of age between 2011 and 2021. This area had a similar average (median) age to the South East as a whole in 2021 (41 years) but a slightly higher average (median) age than England (40 years). The number of people aged '50 to 64 years' rose by just over 4,000 (an increase of 15.4%), while the number of residents between '16 and 19 years' fell by just under 550 (7.7% decrease). With regard to CYP living in Swale, there were minimum differences reported across all other age groups from '4 years or younger' to '20 to 24 years'.

5.2 Gender

The questionnaire also asked participant CYP to describe their gender. A total of 52% respondents identified as 'female', 47% identified as 'male', and the remaining 1% respondents preferred not to answer this question. This data confirms an almost equal gender split across CYP respondents. In terms of the general population across Swale, census data from 2021 reports there are slightly more female residents than male residents (51.3% female and 48.7% male); this pattern is seen across England and in all of Kent's other local authority districts.

5.3 Disability

The questionnaire then asked participant CYP 'Are you disabled or do you have a long-term health condition?' The far larger majority respondents defined as 'non-disabled' (83%), while 8% defined as 'disabled'. The remaining 9% CYP preferred not to answer this question. In terms of the general population across Swale, the latest census data reports 8.5% of Swale residents identified as being 'disabled and/ or limited a lot'. This figure decreased from 9.4% in 2011. In 2021, just over one in nine people (11.3%), identified as being 'disabled and/ or limited a little', compared with 10.7% in 2011. The proportion of Swale residents who identified as 'non-disabled increased from 79.9% to 80.1%. The decrease in the proportion of residents who identified as being disabled (0.9%), was similar to the decrease across the South East (7.2% to 6.2%).

5.4 Ethnicity

Finally, the questionnaire asked participant CYP 'What is your ethnic background?' The majority respondents defined as 'White British' (80%), while 5% defined as 'White Other'. A far lesser proportion respondents defined as 'Mixed or Multiple Heritage' (2%), or 'Black/ Black British' (also 2%). A minority respondents defined as 'Asian/ Asian British' (1%), 'White Traveller' (1%), or 'White Irish' (also 1%). The remaining 9% CYP preferred not to answer this question. In terms of the general population in Swale, census data from 2021 reports 2.3% of Swale residents identified their ethnic group within the 'Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African' categories, up from 1.0% in 2011. The 1.3 percentage-point change was the largest increase among high-level ethnic groups in this area. In 2021, 93.8% people in Swale identified their ethnic group within the 'White' category (compared with 96.6% in 2011), while 1.8% identified their ethnic group within the 'Mixed or Multiple' category (compared with 1.2% the previous decade). The percentage of people who identified their ethnic group within the 'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh' categories increased from 1.1% in 2011 to 1.5% in 2021.



6 Consultation findings

The Swale Youth Voice Project delivered 14 individual participatory workshops, engaging with more than 300 CYP, their teachers and/ or youth group leaders. During the process, consultees were asked what word might best describe arts and cultural activity. The 'word cloud' above illustrates the most frequently repeated terms, reflecting the young participants' positive feelings towards the arts. Additional data collected via the creative consultation workshops and participant questionnaires explored themes relating to the participant CYPs' experience of arts and culture, including e.g., their awareness of current arts and/ or cultural provision across Swale and Kent more broadly; the nature and level of participation in arts and cultural activity; the reasons for their non-engagement; their future aspirations and/ or suggested developments in support of KCC's Cultural Strategy. Findings are therefore presented in the following order:

- Perception of arts and culture in Swale
- Participation in arts and culture
- Reasons for non-engagement
- Suggestions for the future.

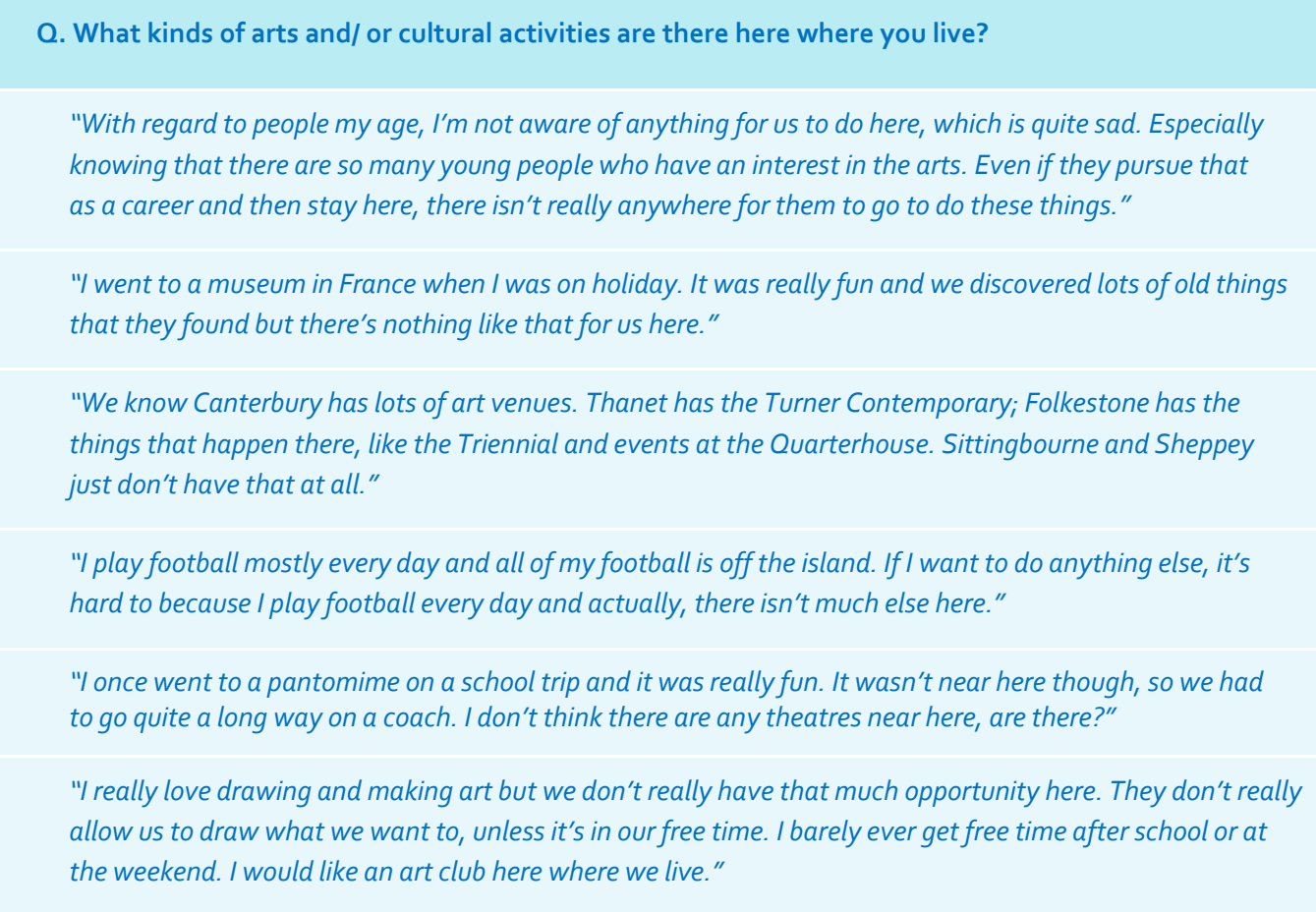
6.1 Perception of arts and culture in Swale

Questionnaires asked participant CYP 'How important are arts/ cultural activities to you?' with 40% respondents suggesting 'very important', 22% noting 'quite important' and 16% 'not very important'; 7% respondents noted 'not at all important', while the remaining 14% respondents 'didn't know'. In spite of these positive findings, qualitative data suggested the young consultees had little prior experience with which to answer this question.

During each consultation workshop, CYP were asked about 'culture' in Swale. However, it was clear from feedback gained in the initial sessions that the majority of participants did not fully understand the terminology, nor did they know what or where 'Swale' was. The workshops were subsequently refined, with questions framed to include 'arts and cultural activities' and 'here where you live'. In response, the far larger majority CYP (84%) reported there was 'very little' arts and/ or cultural 'things to do' in Swale/ here where they live.

Through a series of drama games, debating activities and small group discussions, participants were invited to share their perception of arts and cultural activity in Swale and across Kent more broadly. From the data collected, the absence of local provision for CYP was evident, along with the lack of awareness of what was on offer locally (e.g., Arden Theatre, Faversham; Blue Town Heritage Centre, Sheerness; Creek Creative, Faversham; Kent Police Museum, Faversham; Queenborough Guildhall Museum; Two Creeks Nature Trail, Faversham; Sittingbourne Heritage Museum). Figure 6.1 (below), provides a summary of key responses gathered during the consultation process.

Figure 6.1 Perception of arts and culture in Swale

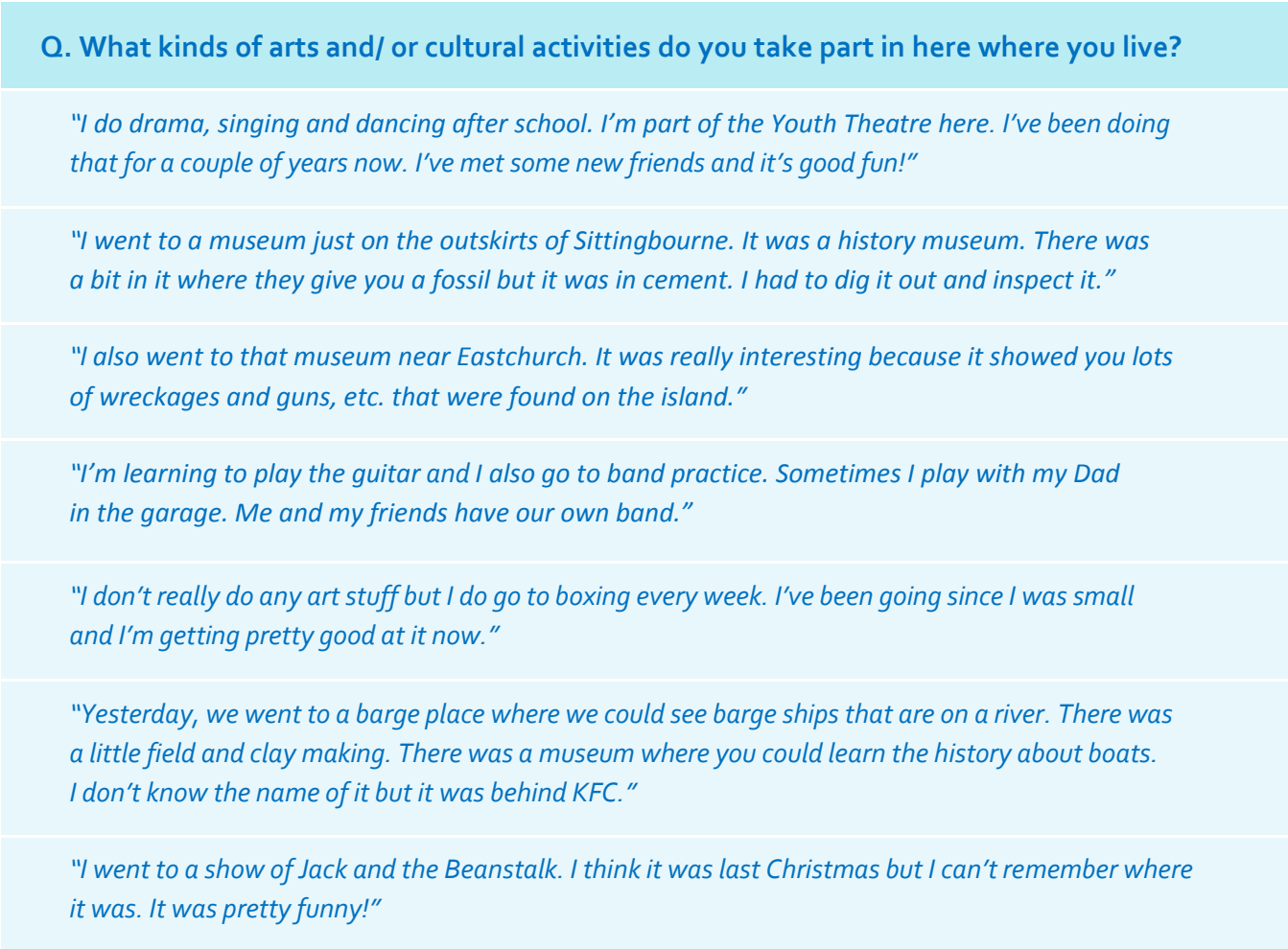


6.2 Participation in arts and culture

The questionnaire asked participant CYP 'When was the last time you took part in arts/ cultural activities outside of school?' Just 38% respondents had participated in an arts/ cultural event (e.g., saw a live performance; went to the cinema; visited a museum, gallery or heritage site), during the past 'three months', while 18% had engaged in the past 'six months'; 8% CYP had taken part in an arts/ cultural event in the past 'twelve months' and for a further 8%, any engagement had been 'longer than a year'. The remaining 29% respondents 'didn't know' when they had last taken part in any such activity, suggesting that it was not a regular feature in their lives.

This theme was further investigated during the participatory workshops, delivered through drama games, debating activities and small group discussions. A large proportion of CYP (54%) described taking part in sports activities (e.g., athletics, football, boxing, horse-riding, swimming), spending time at the amusement arcade(s) and/ or playing video games (31%); a far lesser proportion (15%), suggested they regularly took part in arts/ cultural activity outside of school (e.g., band practice, dance classes, music lessons, visiting the library). Figure 6.2 (below), provides a summary of key responses gathered during the consultation process.

Figure 6.2 Participation in arts and culture



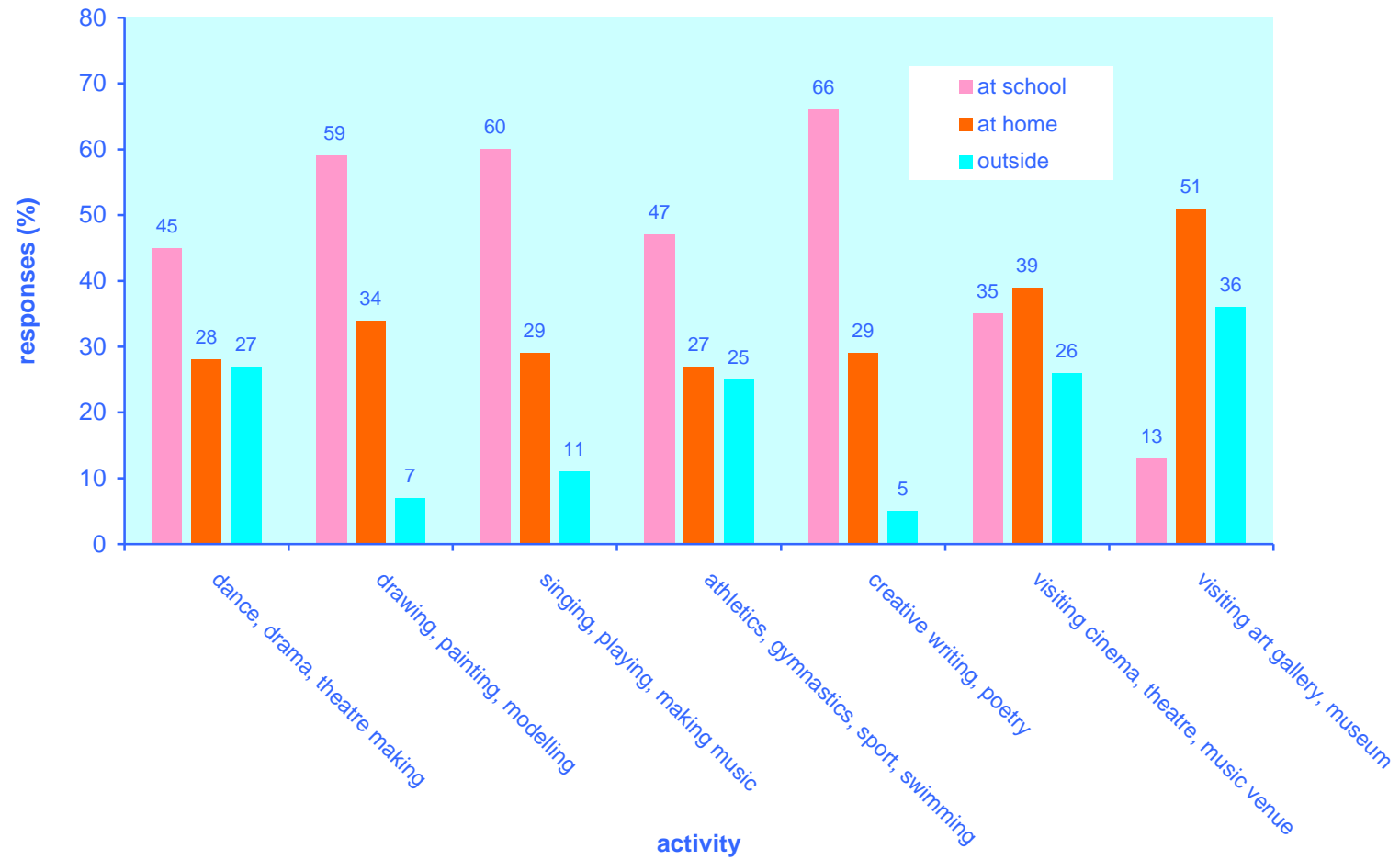
The follow up questionnaire also asked 'Do you take part in any of the following arts/ cultural activities here where you live?' with a list of relevant items informed by those responses collected from CYP during the consultation workshops. As described below and in Figure 6.3 (over page), responses were mixed across each item with the following findings:

- Asked about 'dance, drama and/ or theatre making' activities, 45% respondent CYP reported taking part 'at school', 28% 'at home' and 27% 'outside of school or home'
- Asked about 'drawing, painting and/ or modelling' activities, 59% respondent CYP reported taking part 'at school', 34% 'at home' and 7% 'outside of school or home'
- Asked about 'making music, playing an instrument and/ or singing' activities, 60% respondent CYP reported taking part 'at school', 29% 'at home' and 11% 'outside of school or home'
- Asked about 'athletics, gymnastics, playing sport and/ or swimming' activities, 47% respondent CYP reported taking part 'at school', 27% 'at home' and 25% 'outside of school or home'
- Asked about 'creative writing and/ or poetry' activities, 66% respondent CYP reported taking part 'at school', 29% 'at home' and 5% 'outside of school or home'
- Asked about 'music venue and/ or theatre' visits, 35% respondent CYP reported taking part 'with school', 39% 'with family' and 26% 'outside of school or family'
- Finally, asked about 'art gallery and/ or museum' visits, 13% respondent CYP reported taking part 'with school', 51% 'with family' and 36% 'outside of school or family'

Those 'in school' or 'with school' activities noted to have the lowest levels of participation included music venues, theatres, art galleries and museums, a point worthy of consideration in terms of the CEPs development. Those 'in school' or 'with school' activities noted to have the highest levels of participation included creative writing, making music and/ or visual art, as part of the school curriculum.

Those 'outside of school or home' activities noted to have the lowest levels of participation included creative writing, making music, visual art, suggesting a need for locally based workshops and events. Those 'outside of school or home' activities noted to have the highest levels of participation included dance, drama and sport, as aligned to data collected during the consultation workshops. Visits to art galleries, museums, music venues and theatres also scored highly in terms of 'outside of school or home' participation, frequently through organised group trips via e.g., Brownies, Dance Group, Youth Theatre Group.

Figure 6.3 Participation in arts and culture: questionnaire responses



6.3 Reasons for non-engagement

During the participatory workshops, CYP were asked 'What stops you from taking part in arts/ cultural activities here where you live?' with responses captured through drama games, debating activities and small group discussions. The majority of consultees (86%) suggested 'a lack of arts/ cultural activities' was the main barrier to participation (e.g., no live music gigs; no art studios or art clubs; no cinema or theatre; no festival or carnival), while 63% also noted 'travel or transport' to be a key issue (e.g., CYP living on busy main roads with heavy traffic; limited or no public transport; reliance on parents to access activities). 41% CYP reported 'lack of time' as an obstacle (e.g., homework; family commitments; existing leisure and/ or sports activities), and 37% described 'other community members' as playing a role in preventing engagement (e.g., intimidation by teenagers; gang culture; bullying and vandalism). Figure 6.4 (below), provides a summary of key responses gathered during the consultation process.

Figure 6.4 Reasons for non-engagement

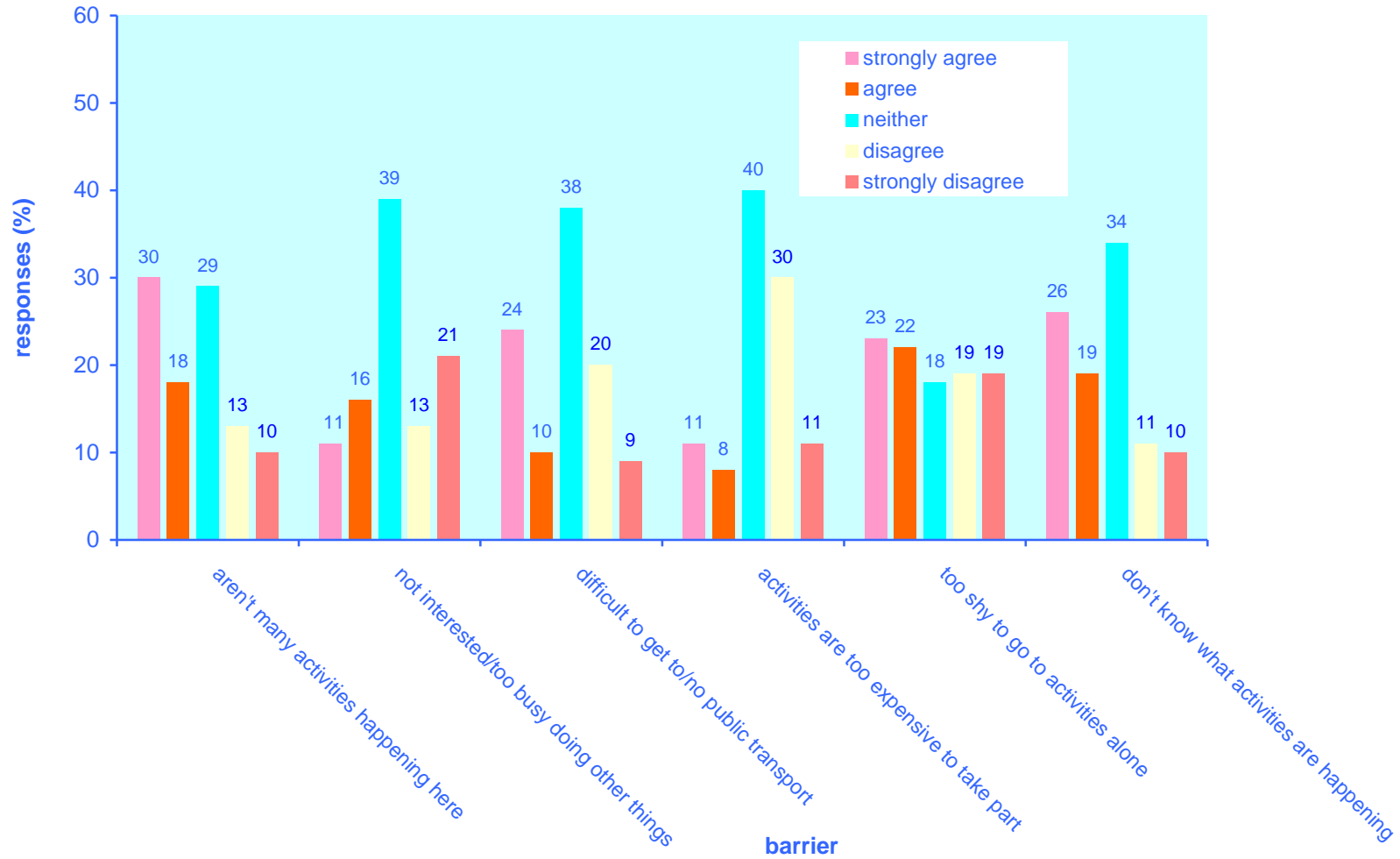


The follow up questionnaire also asked 'What stops you from taking part in arts/ cultural activities here where you live?' with a list of relevant items informed by those responses collected from CYP during the consultation workshops. As described below and in Figure 6.5 (over page), responses were mixed across each item with the following findings:

- 30% respondent CYP 'strongly agreed' that 'there aren't many arts/ cultural activities happening here', while 18% 'agreed'; 29% CYP 'neither agreed nor disagreed', 13% 'disagreed' and 10% 'strongly disagreed'
- 11% respondent CYP 'strongly agreed' that 'they weren't interested or too busy doing other things', while 16% 'agreed'; 39% CYP 'neither agreed nor disagreed', 13% 'disagreed' and 21% 'strongly disagreed'
- 24% respondent CYP 'strongly agreed' that 'it's difficult to get to activities/ there is no public transport', while 10% 'agreed'; 38% CYP 'neither agreed nor disagreed', 20% 'disagreed' and 9% 'strongly disagreed'
- 11% respondent CYP 'strongly agreed' that 'clubs or activities are too expensive to take part', while 8% 'agreed'; 40% CYP 'neither agreed nor disagreed', 30% 'disagreed' and the remaining 11% 'strongly disagreed'
- 23% respondent CYP 'strongly agreed' that 'they were too shy to go to activities on their own', while 22% 'agreed'; 18% CYP 'neither agreed nor disagreed', 19% 'disagreed' and a further 19% 'strongly disagreed'
- 26% respondent CYP 'strongly agreed' that 'they didn't know what arts/ cultural activities were happening here', while 19% 'agreed'; 34% CYP 'neither agreed nor disagreed', 11% 'disagreed' and the remaining 10% 'strongly disagreed'

In terms of barriers to engagement and/ or participation, the highest scoring items were reported to be: an evident lack of arts and cultural activities to take part in in the first instance; a lack of awareness of any activities that might be happening; a lack of confidence in feeling able to go along to any such activities alone. These findings suggest a need for KCC and Swale CEP to consider the necessary development of arts and cultural provision for potential young audiences living locally, how such activity might be effectively promoted and crucially, how to enable those CYP to feel confident enough to engage.

Figure 6.5 Reasons for non-engagement: questionnaire responses



In addition to the aforementioned questions, the consultation workshops included small group discussions, where CYP were asked 'to pitch their idea' for an arts and/ or cultural facility to be developed in Swale during the next five years. Participants were encouraged to 'think big', yet their suggestions were deemed to be modest when compared with the resources available to young people in other parts of Kent (e.g., local history museum with interactives and family events programme; youth club with refreshments, alongside range of creative and sports activities; multi-purpose arts centre for CYP and their families; small, outdoor live music festival and/ or carnival). Figure 6.7 (below), provides examples of 'the proposals' put forward by those CYP engaged in the consultation workshops.

Figure 6.7 Suggestions for the future

Q. What kinds of arts/ cultural facilities would you like to see here where you live?

"We were thinking of something like a 'Fun Club'. Where you could do whatever you want. There could be art stuff, trampolining and a little area for younger children. There would be people to look after the smaller children but they could do art stuff as well. It would be called the 'Fun Centre' or 'Fun Club'. It would always be open during the school holidays and at weekends."

"Our idea is to build a three-storey building with a top floor that you're allowed to go up to. You have to take an elevator to the second floor and there is a graffiti wall. Then on one side of the third floor is laser tag and on the other side is football. On the top, there is a pool and a slide that goes around the entire building. You're allowed water guns and the slide is allowed for those aged 10+. We were thinking it would be a mixed thing, so we're not sure on the name yet. The 'Mega House' maybe, or 'Mega Mix'"

"Our idea is a kind of indoor but outdoor space, so a bit like a mini Eden Project. There would be spaces to make things like sculptures or musical instruments from recycled materials. There would be lots of stuff growing and you could learn all about fruits and vegetables. There could also be ponds and waterfalls with fish to look at. It could also have some night-time things like looking at the moon and stars."

"Our idea is to make a historical, art museum with real art from the past and many other history objects like sculptures. Maybe there is going to be a history play there that you can act in and includes any ages. It could include Tudor art, Roman art and Viking art. Maybe the name could be 'The Historian'."

"We would love to have a space that is free to go to create art. A place where there are free resources. Canvases, clay, paint and spray paint. A massive range of media that you can explore with. Being able to have that space to create and get messy. A lot of people don't have that. There would be people to help you and show you what to do. People would go there after school. It would be sectioned out."

"Our idea is a cinema that shows people acting out a film. Real life cinema! There will be a whole bunch of seats that people can sit on and watch the acting. The actors would be children and young people who have gone to workshops beforehand. There will be refreshments. Healthy drinks and food. Popcorn. It would be free and all ages. We're still thinking of a name."

"We were thinking of having a carnival that is going around Sittingbourne. There would be people dressed up and walking past in little floats. It would be for 1-2 days. There could be Disney characters, princesses and characters that people know. At the end, there would be a big party. The float carnival would go all the way to Sittingbourne Mall and all the way back. There would be refreshments and little breaks. We're still thinking of a name but we thought of 'Fabulous Float Festival'."



7 Learning and recommendations

The following learning outcomes and recommendations are for consideration by KCC and Swale CEP, in collaboration with ICON. They are drawn from the full consultation process but more specifically, via the data collected from teachers, group leaders, arts practitioners and young people across Swale. It is hoped the following sections will provide a useful springboard for discussion, prior to moving forward in the most sustainable manner for all involved.

7.1 Short Term

It is evident from the findings that the majority of consultant CYP had little awareness, understanding or experience of cultural activity where they lived. There is clearly a paucity of arts and cultural opportunities for CYP within and across Swale, compared with other areas of Kent and the UK more broadly. However, there are many skilled creative practitioners and a number of cultural organisations to be engaged in small scale pilot projects, either within or outside of school. Such activities would need to be easily accessible, free at the point of entry and inclusive to a broad range of ages and interests.

- KCC and Swale CEP are recommended to secure funding for developing a Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, for Faversham, Sheppey and Sittingbourne, offering free and inclusive creative events for CYP in receipt of free school meals and/ or with additional needs; such a scheme would enable participant young people to access a range of new activities, engage with arts professionals and share their experiences/ learning with friends and families.
- KCC and Swale CEP are recommended to secure seed funding for testing a series of small scale projects for Swale Schools and in collaboration with local arts organisations and/ or cultural venues; pilot projects of this nature might be aligned to national events (e.g., The Big Draw; Heritage Orchard Days; Museums and Galleries Month; National Day of Dance), establishing relationships between CYP, schools, artists and cultural organisations, raising awareness of skills and resources held within the community, while developing new audiences.

7.2 Medium Term

Findings from the Swale Youth Voice Project suggest a lack of large scale community events, such as carnivals, fairs, annual arts festivals or tours by regional – or indeed national – performance companies. If CYP and their families are not exposed to the full range of creative activity, it is impossible for them to make any informed decision regarding what they would like to see happen in the future. In addition, annual public arts events are recognised to have many positive economic and social impacts for the local community (e.g., Art in Romney Marsh; Broadstairs Folk Festival; Coastal Currents Arts Festival; Create Music Village; Folkestone Triennial; Whitstable Biennale). Such activity brings new audience members to an area, while increasing civic pride amongst residents. Swale includes a rich diversity of both rural and urban locations which might offer previously undiscovered settings for these annual events, enabling community members and visitors alike to experience high quality arts activity.

- KCC and Swale CEP are recommended to secure funding for developing an annual cross arts festival for the area, open to CYP, families and visitors to the area; advice should be sought from comparable settings in the first instance, alongside consultation with local arts providers. Interestingly, several consultees suggested the 'Fun Palace' model, now happening in c.20 locations across the UK; this might provide a valuable template with which to begin the development of such an annual programme for Swale.
- KCC and Swale CEP are recommended to secure funding for developing a comprehensive live performance touring programme for Swale. Applause Rural Touring have extensive experience of working with communities across Swale, Kent and the south east more broadly. Engaging local and national companies to perform in unusual and underused venues would enable CYP and their families to access a diversity of affordable arts experiences, without having to travel.

7.3 Longer Term

Despite local employment growth, Swale has a low ratio between jobs and working age population, something common to many parts of Kent. Earnings are also well behind both County and regional averages, reflecting the need for more and better paid jobs in the Borough and reducing the volume of out-commuting. With a concentration upon manufacturing, transport and distribution, there is a need to diversify and create a more resilient local economy. The creative industries represent only 7% of all businesses in Swale, the lowest concentration in Kent. In the first instance, policy makers will need to understand the barriers to growth and what might be done to support development in the sector.

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019), identifies 'skills' as an area where the Borough of Swale is ranked in the worst 10% nationally. This clearly impacts on access to work opportunities for local people but also, the type of employment-led investment the Borough is able to attract. It is important that residents are given the opportunity to benefit from economic growth, whether locally or further afield. However, many individuals and families face significant barriers to employment including, e.g., travel and transport issues; lack of confidence; low levels of education and/ or skills; health issues. A renewed focus is required for policy makers (i.e., Swale Borough Council and Kent County Council), to address the limited further education provision for Swale's young people, alongside a commitment to see residents provided with new and diverse opportunities to upskill and/ or retrain across all life stages.



8 Summary and conclusions

The Swale Youth Voice Project set out to investigate the perceptions and experiences of CYP pertaining to arts and cultural provision across the Borough, with specific reference to those young people living in Faversham, Sheppey and Sittingbourne. This brief study meanwhile aimed to present the results of the consultation process, with data captured during the creative participatory workshops, discussion groups and interviews. The purpose of the consultation and its subsequent findings is to assist KCC and Swale CEP in gaining a greater understanding of the interests and needs of CYP in the area, prior to developing its arts and cultural strategies. The report has described suggestions made by the young audience members, while highlighting key issues pertaining to arts and culture, for both Swale residents and local authority service providers. It has also provided recommendations for reflection, discussion and forward planning.

Community participation in shaping arts and cultural programmes is generally considered positively, for both democratic involvement and in providing local knowledge which policy makers otherwise wouldn't have access to. However, the manner in which this is achieved is crucial, since it may also be detrimental to outcomes. Poor attempts at engagement can lead to disillusionment with the participatory process. Despite best efforts, attempts seldom manage to include those with fewest resources, frequently appropriated by unrepresentative groups or those with greater social capital. Engaging the commitment and trust of local communities takes extensive time and resourcefulness, with the need for consistent, regular and meaningful interaction. This brief consultation has begun to establish important, new connections with those diverse and developing young community members of Swale. However, only with sustained commitment will Swale CEP and KCC be able to continue in their vital role(s) as arts and cultural providers.

Within the confines of the present study, the surface has been lightly scratched - at least in terms of research - and has naturally prompted more questions than it may have answered. It is hoped however the findings will be of value in supporting Swale CEP and KCC in beginning relationships and developing new, inspiring cultural programmes in collaboration with the residents of Faversham, Sheppey and Sittingbourne. Importantly, it has provided a rich source of baseline data for beginning discussions with potential community partners, thereby leading to a greater understanding of how engagement with the arts might result in valuable social impacts, while supporting key local authority policy agendas. The field of cultural research is not fully developed, yet further collaborations between community members, arts professionals, statutory service providers, policy makers and researchers will undoubtedly lead to a greater understanding of what might constitute effective practice.

“I would just like to have a space locally to make work alongside others. Being able to create in some kind of arts venue with other people means sharing ideas and resources. It can also help reduce anxiety. You get used to new people and you’re able to see what other people are interested in. If making art was something that you wanted to pursue in the future, you might find a way into that. It could be really positive!”

Swale Youth Voice Project Consultee, May 2023

9 End note

On conclusion of the Swale Youth Voice Project, eight young consultees and emerging writers created their own Youth Voice Manifesto. They have recommended this 'call to action' should be shared with all policy makers and wider stakeholders responsible for arts and cultural provision for CYP in Swale. This feels to be a fitting end note for the consultation report and a look to the future.

Youth Voice Manifesto

We are the young people of Swale and our voices matter – please listen!

We are the young people of Swale and our voices matter!

We are invested in making decisions that directly impact our lives

Both now and in the future

If we are truly listened to, we will be empowered and motivated to fulfil our true potential

Young people make art because it gives them a voice when other ways of talking don't work

If young people are free to make art, they can communicate what's most important to them

Young people need the arts to show them what potential there is in the world around them

If young people don't have access to the arts, life becomes black and white

A sense of their own identity and community is lost

Young people need to be heard because they think outside the box

They don't even know about the box!

If young people are ignored they will feel unable to speak up about the things that matter most

Young people need access to theatre because it gives them joy and expands their horizons

If young people never go to the theatre they limit their words, their worlds, their capacity to create

If we can't see it, how can we be it?

We are the young people of Swale, we need creative opportunities!

The arts feed our souls in ways nothing else can

If young people are given opportunities for culture and creativity

They nurture a special part of themselves

Enabling them to imagine and see a world they wish to create

To explore and to make that future world a reality.

Young Writers

Eli Bradburn

Peyton-Jai Collier Kettle

Demi-Leigh Collier Kettle

Mollie Costello

Liliana Rose Dell

Kez Harris

Jasper Pluck

Brooke Spokes