Journeys Project Evaluation Report

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Journeys Project Outline

The 'JOURNEYS' Project was a large-scale ambitious project that aimed to bring people together to celebrate shared cultural heritage from diverse Commonwealth communities. This work aimed to raise the profile of cultural organisations outside of the capital, helping to put the whole West Midlands region on the map. The project was funded by the Inclusive Communities Fund, a legacy fund for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, also known as Birmingham 2022.

The core partners for this project were Legacy WM, Kalaboration Arts, Simmer Down Arts, Bangladeshi Artist Development Agency (BADA), Saathi House, Handsworth Creative and Nowka Bais. This core partnership worked with key venues in Birmingham as hosts for the performing arts strands of the project: Birmingham Hippodrome, The Rep, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Whilst some of these organisations had collaborated in the past this was the first time this partnership of organisations had come together to deliver a project.

Planned Activity

- Production of 'Partition of the Heart' by Kalaboration Arts
- Production of 'Glory' by Simmer Down Arts
- Bangla Week Festival by BADA
- Youth theatre and family history project by Saathi House
- Family and school arts days and arts tours in Handsworth Park by Handsworth Creative
- Women's Regatta and bell boating sessions by Nowka Bais

The project had two main strands:

- Performing Arts productions and events with performances by both professional and volunteer/ amateur artists (Kalaboration Arts, Simmer Down Arts, BADA and Saathi House)
- Outdoor events encouraging engagement in green and blue spaces (Handsworth Creative and Nowka Bais)

Planned Outputs

Target	Target number	Actual numbers
People accessing project (combined audiences, participants, volunteers)	3451 attendances	3686 attendances
Ticketed audiences	575 tickets booked	1518 tickets booked
Volunteer experiences for young people (under 25)	41 young people volunteering	62 young people volunteering
Volunteer experiences for adults aged 26+	10 volunteers	53 volunteers
Family History community workshops	25 people	19 people
Children engaging in green and blue spaces	630 children	803 children
Attendance at park arts/ heritage tours	200 people	250 people
Pupils in West Birmingham receiving content and instruction from project	1890 hours	3001 hours
Rowers in Nowka Bais Regatta	137 rowers	435 rowers

Almost all output targets were exceeded, some very significantly such as ticketed audiences, number of volunteers and number of pupils hours for the schools engagement. The family history

workshops number is slightly lower, however this does not include the community sessions and workshops carried out by Kalaboration Arts Partition of the Heart as they were not technically family history workshops, but they had a relevance to the family history of many people attending, and were exploring the heritage of the people engaging.

Planned Outcomes

- Bringing together people from diverse communities to celebrate our shared cultural heritage
- Meaningful volunteering experiences for young people
- Improved engagement with outdoor green and blue spaces
- People from disadvantaged communities in Birmingham engaging in arts and cultural experiences.

Additional Outcomes

- New relationships and networks developed between the partner organisations and the professional creatives working on the project.
- Positive impact on participants' mental health, wellbeing and confidence.

'For many of us in POTH, the most powerful and transformative moment in the project was the performance of Suleyman Hussain, a 15-year-old participant in Partition of the Heart. Suleyman's journey to the stage was nothing short of extraordinary. Initially, he approached us with a heartfelt letter expressing his passion for rapping and hip hop, even though we had no roles available at the time. His persistence and determination to volunteer, learn, and grow stood out, and when an unexpected vacancy arose, as the enlisted rapper for the show had to drop out because his mother was taken seriously ill two weeks before the show, we gave Suleyman a chance.

Despite being withdrawn and lacking confidence at the start, Suleyman worked tirelessly to master his role and he was up against accomplished artists and master musicians with many years in the arts. Supported by the team and working closely with Mukhtar the artistic director, he transformed into a dynamic performer, delivering lyrics that he reinterpreted and rewrote so that they resonated with his style and youth. His mother was a quiet presence throughout rehearsals, bringing him chocolate as a small gesture of encouragement. On the opening night which happened to be Suleyman's 16 birthday, however, she shared something that moved us all to tears: up until the age of seven, Suleyman had been labelled a 'mute,' unable to speak and eating chocolate was his way of comfort eating and getting confidence and resting his nerves. His journey to finding his voice—through rap, art, and performance—culminated in him taking the stage and captivating an audience for the first time.

That moment revealed the true power of art to transform lives. It gave Suleyman not just a voice, but self-confidence, purpose, and an opportunity to shine. Witnessing his courage and growth was a humbling and unforgettable experience that affirmed why we do what we do as Kalaboration Arts. – Mukhtar Dar, Kalaboration Arts

Partnership Working

The new partnership of organisations formed in order to deliver this project had a positive impact on everyone involved. The collaboration and support between the organisations and professional

creatives working on the project has resulted in a range of benefits, contributing to the success of the project and providing future opportunities.

Organisations attending the steering group meetings provided support and guidance to colleagues, and helped problem solve issues. This included finding alternative venues and connecting artists to different project strands. Participants and audiences from different project strands were signposted to other activity within the wider project, that they may not have accessed without that referral.

Everyone involved has broadened their professional networks. Partner organisations have valued the opportunity to work with people they had not worked with before and renew connections from pre-pandemic partnerships. Many of the individuals involved have supported each other to find new work and opportunities beyond the project. The raised profile of the combined project drew in interest and brokered new connections with organisations beyond Birmingham.

"Can I take the opportunity to congratulate you on your achievement! I am personally pleased to see that the Bangladeshi community are beginning to organize and become more involved in the arts and last night was a wonderful showcase of that talent, professionalism and collaboration in a beautiful venue . We have a small Bengali community here in Worcester that I and the Worcester Mela Team am keen to engage with and hopefully a few opportunities will present themselves in the coming year". Cllr Jabba Riaz - Chair & Founder of Worcester Mela

Celebrating Our Shared Cultural Heritage

The four performance strands within this project all celebrated and shared different aspects of the cultural heritage of communities living in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

Bangla Week focused on performances and visual art of Bangladeshi artists. Glory told the story of African American musician and 'godmother of rock n roll' Sister Rosetta Tharpe whose performances in the UK had a significant influence on UK artists. Saathi House's project shared the family histories of the young people involved in the project. Partition of the Heart marked the 76th anniversary of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, the largest mass migration journey in human history.

Partition of the Heart – Kalaboration Arts

Kalaboration Arts' Partition of the Heart (POTH) project was a multidisciplinary community arts initiative designed to align with the 'Journeys' theme chosen by Legacy West Midlands. The project aimed to connect communities, foster intercultural understanding, and celebrate the shared histories of Birmingham's South Asian communities.

The research and development phase of the POTH project involved extensive community engagement and specialist input to ensure an accurate and nuanced portrayal of the historical and cultural significance of Partition.

Workshops and Meetings:

Two community workshops were conducted at the Shaheed Udham Singh Centre in Handsworth. These workshops were led by South Asian historian and museum curator Rajwinder Pal, with contributions from guest speaker Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed, a Pakistani-Swedish political scientist and author of The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed. Together, these workshops attracted 36 attendees.

Community Collaboration

Twelve face-to-face meetings were held with members of the Indian Workers Association, the Rationalist Society, the South Asian Alliance, and former members of the Pakistani Workers Association. These discussions delved into the complex historical narratives of Partition, its causes, and its continued impact on the subcontinent and the South Asian diaspora in Birmingham.

Expert Consultations

The project team engaged in one-on-one conversations with activists, writers, and academics from the South Asian community. Their expertise provided rich insights, significantly enhancing the project's narrative focus and depth.

Performances

The POTH project culminated in two sold-out performances at the Midlands Arts Centre (MAC). Tickets sold out within two weeks of release, with the MAC Box Office reporting significant additional demand that could have easily supported two additional shows.

'This is paying tribute to a very dear friend, comrade, Aijaz Kalim, who lived through partition, and his whole life was dedicated to fighting borders and division, overcoming them. This story that we're telling is a universal story, because every single one of us, whether we're Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshi's, Kashmiris, we have all been impacted by partition. Even white people that come to this theatre – we are here because they were there. So this a universal story, it's the story that we're weaving together. It's the story Aijaz wanted to tell, he was very much impacted by it. Sadly he passed away, he never got to tell the story, I was fortunate to have interviewed him. And tonight we've put those interviews into the whole production, and with that incredible cast and the different artforms, we're telling that story. Its always easy to scapegoat and pick on minorities, and what we're doing is telling the story that we're all human beings, its borders that kill, and that no human being is illegal. Birmingham is a great city, which has embraced migration, it's a city built on migration, so this story is at the heart of what Birmingham represents ' – Mukhtar Dar

Audience Profile: The performances attracted a diverse audience from Birmingham and beyond, including attendees from London, Coventry, and Worcester. The audience's demographics included South Asian communities (Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Kashmiri) as well as White and African-Caribbean attendees.

Audience Feedback: The emotional resonance of the performances was palpable. Many audience members were moved to tears, with three leaving the auditorium temporarily due to the intensity of the content.

"It was informative, it was entertaining, and it was really thought-provoking, I came to see it from London, it needs to tour."

"I am blown away by the stories that I've heard today, partition is part of British history and ought to be part of the school's curriculum."

"A really moving and unifying experience, I'm really glad that I travelled to see it from Worcester."

'Well I didn't really know what to expect, it was just an incredible show, very powerful, I was blown away by it really. It just kind of reconciled what I understood about this history and really brought it together. It was performed so brilliantly, and I found the poetry really kind of pulled it together.'

The Partition of the Heart project successfully met its objectives by exploring the largest displacement and exodus in human history while addressing the dangers of nationalism and populism in stoking religious and ethnic prejudices. By highlighting the need for unity and solidarity,

the project drew parallels to contemporary issues, such as the legacy of Partition in Palestine and the rise of far-right movements in Europe and the UK. Audience feedback confirmed that POTH was not only informative and emotionally impactful but also uplifting, emphasising human resilience, compassion, and solidarity in the face of adversity. The performances provided a platform for intercultural dialogue and fostered a deeper understanding of shared histories, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended.

Volunteers

115 people volunteered their time within this project, and 62 of them were young people under 25 years of age. This is far beyond the target numbers within the original project plans.

There was a wide range of opportunities across the different project strands to volunteer in different ways, with different levels of commitment, from supporting one off events to rehearsing and performing in a community production.

Volunteers identified several positive outcomes from their experience with the project:

- Meeting new people and making new friendships
- Learning new skills and gaining new experiences that have opened up further opportunities
- Boosting confidence
- Experience performing to an audience (many for the first time, or performing a new skill)

Several of the volunteers gained new jobs and opportunities as a result of volunteering with the project.

Amani volunteered as a stage manager for Saathi House. She had never worked with young people before. Following the experience she applied for teacher training and was able to speak about her experience volunteering with the project in her interview, which she said contributed to her success in gaining a place.

Samriti was successful in getting a paid job at Legacy WM after volunteering for Bangla Week:

> *'As a volunteer I supported the Legacy WM team with Family Arts Day (the launch day for Bangla Week 2024). On the day, I worked on reception and welcomed vendors and guests…*
> *Leading up to Bangla Week I worked closely with Legacy's marketing officer, Sandhya, to ensure that email communications were constantly reviewed and updated so that guests were informed of each event's key details. This ensured that Legacy maintained a close relationship with guests and made sure that they were valued.*
> *Shortly after Family Arts day, I was offered a part-time position with Legacy as an Administrative Assistant. I was inspired by their dedication to highlighting underrepresented communities and showcasing their arts and heritage. Now, as a Legacy employee, I am excited at the opportunities I am given to further my skillset and knowledge; as well as enriching the cultural value of the Midlands.'* – Samriti, Bangla Week volunteer

Pooriya is now in a training scheme at Birmingham airport:

> *"Since volunteering at Legacy WM I have learnt new skills that have improved my confidence and communication skills. During the Closing Night for Bangla Week my main responsibilities were to serve food and drinks to guests and make them feel welcomed. For someone who has suffered depression and anxiety, I didn't like being in large groups of people. The reason why I started volunteering is to be more active and to find a job.*

Currently I am doing 2 weeks training at Birmingham Airport about aviation and what jobs are available at the airport." – Pooriya, Bangla Week volunteer

Volunteer performers and artists

This project provided really meaningful, well structured and well supported opportunities for many people to perform or showcase their talent for the first time, or to different or bigger audiences.

Bangla Week Festival

The Bangla Week Festival included performances and exhibitions by 90 artists over a series of events, 52 of whom were volunteers, alongside experienced professionals. 21 of the volunteer artists were aged under 25.

"I am so pleased my daughter performed at the Hippodrome. Please continue to engage my daughter in arts, I don't want her to be like me. I want her to grow and be confident. Thank you for giving her a chance." Parent of young poet

BADA's project also provided a local visual artist with his first solo exhibition:

"I am incredibly grateful to Legacy and Bangla Week for providing me with the opportunity to showcase some of my art during Bangla Week. As a brand designer, I've often found it challenging to share my personal art with the public, but this platform allowed me to bring some of my creations to life and connect with a wider audience.

A heartfelt thank you to Aftab and Junna for believing in me and offering me this chance to highlight my passion. Returning to my roots in art has been a long-held ambition, and this experience has reignited my love for creative expression. Over the years, I've faced significant mental health struggles, and art has been a therapeutic outlet, helping me break down barriers and rediscover a sense of clarity and purpose.

This exhibition was more than just an event; it was a deeply personal journey of healing and self-expression. I'm honored to have been part of it and look forward to continuing to share my work with the world."- Ruhul Islam, artist exhibiting his work during Bangla Week.

The Saathi House youth theatre and family history project

Young people at Prince Albert High School in Perry Barr were given the opportunity to experience devising a theatre production and performing at Birmingham Hippodrome as well as performing to pupils at their school. There is no drama provision at Prince Albert High School, so for many of them this was their first experience of doing any theatre work, some had experience of doing a pantomime at primary school as their only other reference point. Prince Albert is a new school that has been open 4 years.

The project was delivered in after school sessions, facilitated by experienced professional theatre practitioner Fateha Begum. It was supported by the school as part of their enrichment programme and they saw it as an ideal opportunity to offer children access to drama whilst they are unable to offer this in their curriculum. Staff at the school did say that this project has made them more interested in working towards bringing drama into the curriculum, as well as creating a more regular drama club offer as part of their enrichment programme.

19 young people engaged in this project, with 16 performing in the show. Participants also had the opportunity to see Hamilton at Birmingham Hippodrome and participate in visual arts workshops in Handsworth Park as part of the Handsworth Creative project.

The young people participated in family history workshops and then interviewed their families, focusing on the journeys of their families to come to settle in Birmingham. These stories then formed the basis of the performance which they devised with Fateha. All of the young people had parents or grandparents who were born in another country, and some were born in another country themselves. The project provided an opportunity for them to share and celebrate their cultures and home languages. They also explored racism and bullying within the show they created.

- I'm hoping that people will watch this show and relate to it, really, because its stories that young people have experienced, its their stories – I'm just the person that puts it all together – but all the content is actually theirs, the lines, they've improvised them, they've solved the scenes and decided who the characters could be, and from that, its my job as a director to weave it together into a story. So we hope you come away you know, feeling enlightened, happy, and proud really, of the young people that are telling their stories.

'I think it's important for all young people from these communities to tell their stories, because I want it to be their stories that they tell, not somebody else telling their stories, because its important they take ownership and they're proud of who they are, and their heritage, and only you can tell your own story really….Many of the young people were reluctant to speak in their home languages and were embarrassed about who they were. Through the project they started to be more confident sharing their own cultures and stories. They also responded really positively to the opportunity to understand each others' cultures more' – Fateha Begum, Saathi House

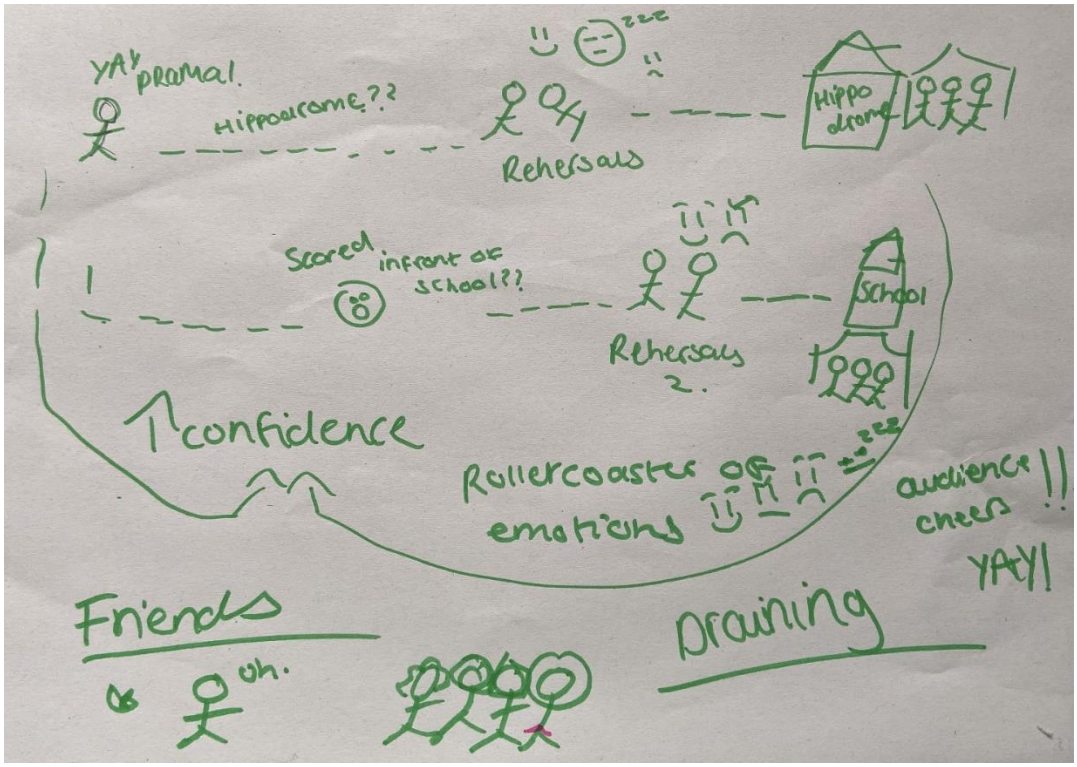
The young people identified several positive outcomes from their experience with the project:

- *'Getting our stories heard'*
- Meeting and working with new people
- Gaining confidence and self esteem
- Learning drama and performance skill

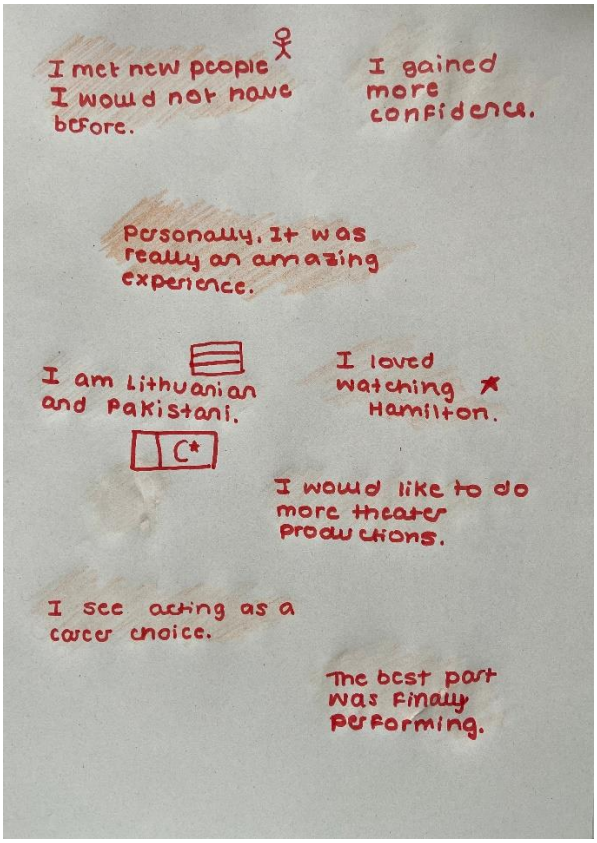
'I feel more connected to my culture and proud to be from Pakistan'

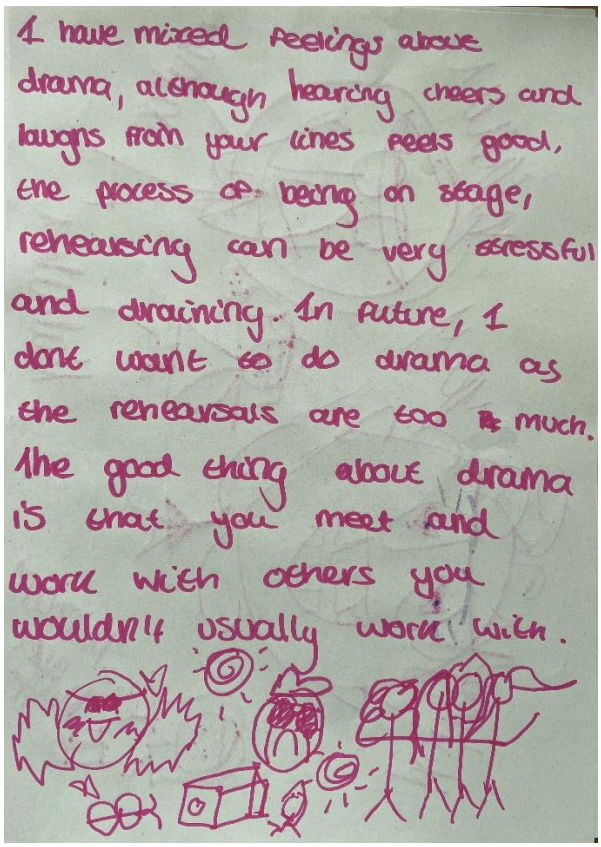
'It felt good to act being racist as I got to put someone else in my shoes, make them think how it feels, instead of them being racist to me, instead of being discriminated against'

'I'm in this play about journeys and how when different families came into Birmingham, and I'm playing myself and my grandfather. It's been a really eye opening experience, like, understanding how different families came into Birmingham, and it allows me to explore more different cultures and what their different customs are, and that I find that interesting and cultivating.'



Several of the participants did express how challenging the project was for them, particularly the need to rehearse and work hard to get the performance right. Whilst they were potentially viewing this as a negative, it demonstrates a positive outcome of the project as this opportunity enabled them to experience what it feels like to work hard to create something of quality, in contrast to their other experiences, where they potentially experience lots of quick wins through digital and social media.





Simmer Down Arts community production of Glory

The cast of Glory were all volunteer performers. For all of them this was a new challenge that they embraced and excelled in. Some of the cast were professional singers or musicians but had never acted before, some had done other amateur performance, some had never done any performance at all.

"6-7 months ago, I never thought I'd be here, I sing but nothing like this"

The majority of the cast of 11 performers were adults, with two under 25. The youngest performer was 13.

The cast were supported by a team of professional artists – theatre director, musical director and choregrapher.

The cast enjoyed the learning opportunities they gained from this experience, including how to speak in accents and stage craft.

"Not only reading the script but also understanding the script, from the director point of view"

They fully embraced the opportunity to challenge themselves.

'It has taken me completely out of my comfort zone, it's scary but, I like that. Feel the fear but do it anyway.'

'People find out stuff about themselves, doing things that they wouldn't do under normal circumstances.'

They all highlighted how special the bond was between them and the friendships that had grown.

'Everyone compliment each other. Supportive. Collaborative. Respectful. Fulfilling'

'It feels like a family'

This production told the story of 'the original soul sister' and 'godmother of rock n roll' Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Despite her influence on early rock n roll legends such as Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and also later guitarists, such as Eric Clapton, and being the first great recording star of gospel music, her story is not well known.

Both the cast and audiences enjoyed the opportunity to learn about this incredible woman and her place in musical history.

'I learnt about a musician I knew very little about and left feeling elevated'

Engagement with outdoor green and blue spaces

Two of the project strands were focused on increasing engagement in outdoor spaces. All of the participants within this strand of the project were from Birmingham with the majority from Handsworth, Newtown, Lozells and Aston.

Handsworth Park Arts Trails and Arts Activity Days

Handsworth Creative delivered arts trails and arts activity days for local Primary Schools and families in Handsworth Park.

The trails explored the public art within the park and the heritage and history that some of the pieces represent. Participants also had an opportunity to design their own piece of public art using clay.

'The kids are actually really enjoying the fact that they're learning so much about all the statues and all these things they've got laid out around the park.' – Teaching Assistant at School Art Trail Tour.

'What I like the most about being a part of these workshops is not only telling the children about the art in the park but seeing them interact with and hearing their thoughts about art. Today we had some really good insight into the children's understanding of local history, as well as the cultural backgrounds and fabric of our community.' – Natascha Rohde, Handsworth Creative

502 children and 33 school staff participated in the schools sessions.

235 people participated in the family arts activity days and 250 people participated in the family tours of the Handsworth park Art Trail.

'We were looking at art pieces, and my favourite art piece was the SS Journey. I liked the history of it.' - participant

'My favourite art piece is the treasure chest, because you can't open it, and just like, you can think about what's inside of it.' - participant

Women's Regatta and bell boating sessions

Nowka Bais delivered taster bell boating sessions, a women's regatta and a consultation event, all aimed at encouraging more women into rowing, particularly women of South Asian heritage.

75 women participated in the regatta at Edgbaston Reservoir on 7th July. There were 360 participants at 18 bell boating taster sessions delivered across Birmingham. 50 people attended a consultation session at Midland Sailing Club on 15th December.

People from disadvantaged communities in Birmingham engaging in arts and cultural experiences

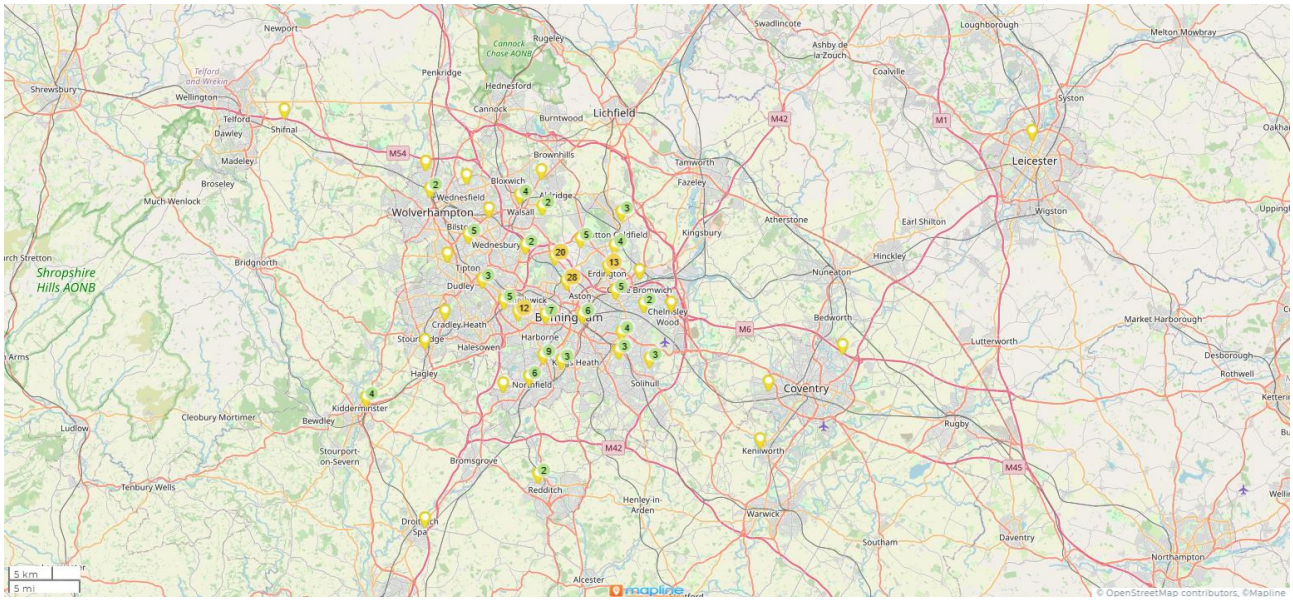
All of the participants within this project were from Birmingham. The performances drew both a local and national audience. The majority of audiences were from Birmingham (between 60% and 90% for different performances) with 10-30% from the wider West Midlands, particularly the Black Country and 10-15% from outside the West Midlands.

The outdoor strands of the project drawing large numbers of participants from Birmingham had a majority of participants from Handsworth, Newtown, Lozells and Aston. All of these wards were in the 10% most deprived areas nationally in 2019[1] and in the top 16 most deprived wards in the city.

1

Accurate audience mapping is not possible as the events took place at different venues with different ticketing systems, some of which either did not gather postcode information or are unable to extract and share it due to GDPR regulations.

The map below shows the spread of audiences across the Midlands for Glory and some Bangla Week events, but is also representative of other audiences. In addition there were 4 people from London.

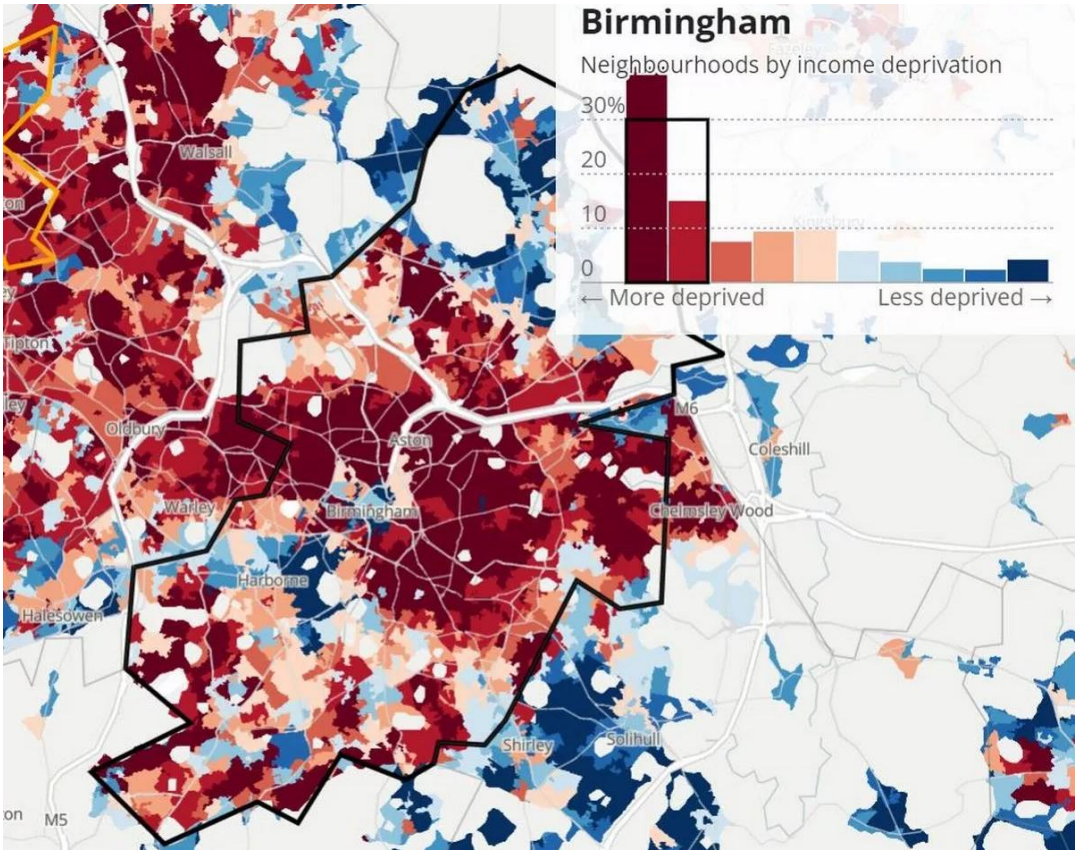


The map below shows the spread of audiences across Birmingham, which again show a concentration around Handsworth, Newtown, Lozells and Aston with the addition of Perry Barr, reflecting the families attending the opening night performance of Bangla Week, which included the Saathi House Youth project performance with Prince Albert High School in Perry Barr.



As evidenced by the map below the majority of Birmingham and the Black Country are amongst the most deprived areas in the country, and the areas where the highest concentration of participants and audiences came from are amongst the most deprived wards in the city and region.

So even with partial postcode evidence it can be assumed that the majority of people participating in the project and attending events and activities are from disadvantaged communities. Many people benefitting from this project are also disadvantaged by racial marginalisation, including those who may live in less deprived areas of the city or region, who therefore experience intersectional marginalization and disadvantage.



As the project focused on sharing the cultural heritage of South Asian and African Caribbean heritage, and mainly reached audiences with the same heritage.

This project was successful in providing people from disadvantaged communities in Birmingham opportunities to engage in arts and cultural experiences both due to the location of activities within those communities such as Handsworth Park, and because the projects shared stories, art and culture that was reflective and representative of those communities and took that to larger venues in the city.

'I always felt very insecure of my like skin tone, cause I thought well why is there no actors that look like me? It's really important that more and more representation happens, and I think its vital we have a platform like this, because it's very difficult to name a Bangladeshi singer or actress.' – Performer in Bangla Week

Marketing and Social Media Engagement

The project exceeded the targets for audiences and participants, which is evidence of successful marketing and social media engagement, but also a result of the existing strong connections the partner organisations have with their local communities that they built upon to successfully engage people in this project.

There was some crossover of audiences between the project strands, although there could have been a more structured and planned approach to this, with a shared marketing and social media strategy and action plan, which could have produced even greater results.

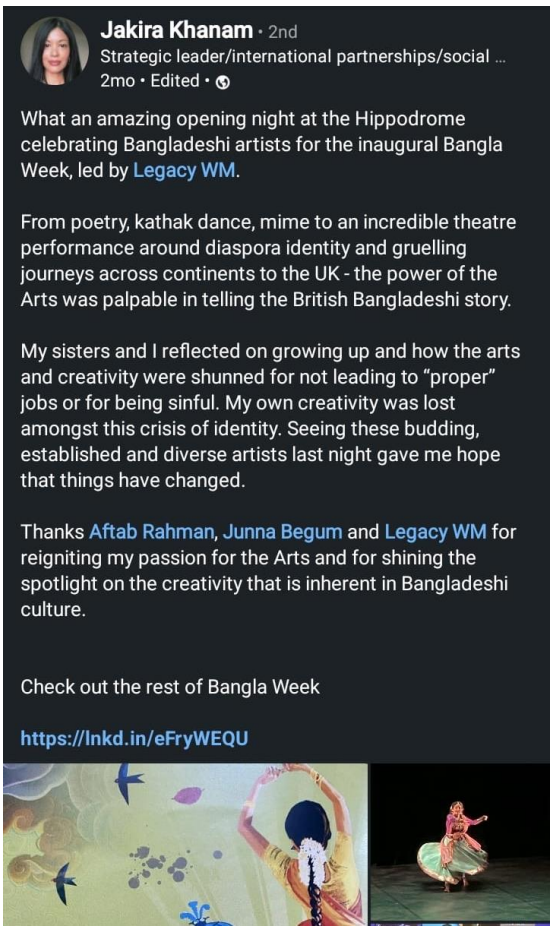
Both Partition Of The Heart and Glory had sell-out shows.

The Bangla Week Festival had a series of smaller capacity events. The higher number of events within Bangla Week, within a short timeframe, mainly targeted at the same audience, could have had a negative effect on audience numbers for each individual event. Less events or a more spread out programme may have helped to encourage audience to attend multiple events, and give time to build audiences throughout the festival.

Many of the events had very positive engagement and feedback on social media.



This evening, I attended a poetry night 'Poetry After Chai' at the Midlands Arts Centre celebrating Bangla artists and Culture. This event was made possible by Legacy WM and Aftab Rahman , whom I had the pleasure to meet. I had the opportunity to perform one of my poems during the open mic to share my connection to the Bangla language. It was my first performance in front of an audience, and I am really blessed that I was able to perform in front of other talented artists and the Bengali community. I had to step out of my comfort zone for this, but I am glad that I was able to take the leap - growth really does start beyond the boundaries of comfort... My poem is called 'Broken Bangla', and I am happy to be able to share my performance with my Linkedin network (thanks to my younger sister who recorded the video!)



Jakira Khanam · 2nd
Strategic leader/international partnerships/social ...
2mo • Edited •

What an amazing opening night at the Hippodrome celebrating Bangladeshi artists for the inaugural Bangla Week, led by Legacy WM.

From poetry, kathak dance, mime to an incredible theatre performance around diaspora identity and gruelling journeys across continents to the UK - the power of the Arts was palpable in telling the British Bangladeshi story.

My sisters and I reflected on growing up and how the arts and creativity were shunned for not leading to "proper" jobs or for being sinful. My own creativity was lost amongst this crisis of identity. Seeing these budding, established and diverse artists last night gave me hope that things have changed.

Thanks Aftab Rahman, Junna Begum and Legacy WM for reigniting my passion for the Arts and for shining the spotlight on the creativity that is inherent in Bangladeshi culture.

Check out the rest of Bangla Week

https://lnkd.in/eFryWEQU



Erdington Walking Group
13 August 2024 ·

Erdington Walking Group had such a great time receiving a Guided Art Trail Tour by Handsworth Creative on Sunday 11th August .

"Handsworth Park Arts Trail was created over three years and introduced new innovative pieces of public art into the beautiful setting of Handsworth Park in Birmingham. The tour will include some history about the park (Victorian and more recent), who the artists are, why and how they chose their designs, how public art is made and where else in Birmingham you can see public art."
Handsworth Creative

Enjoy some photos More to follow!



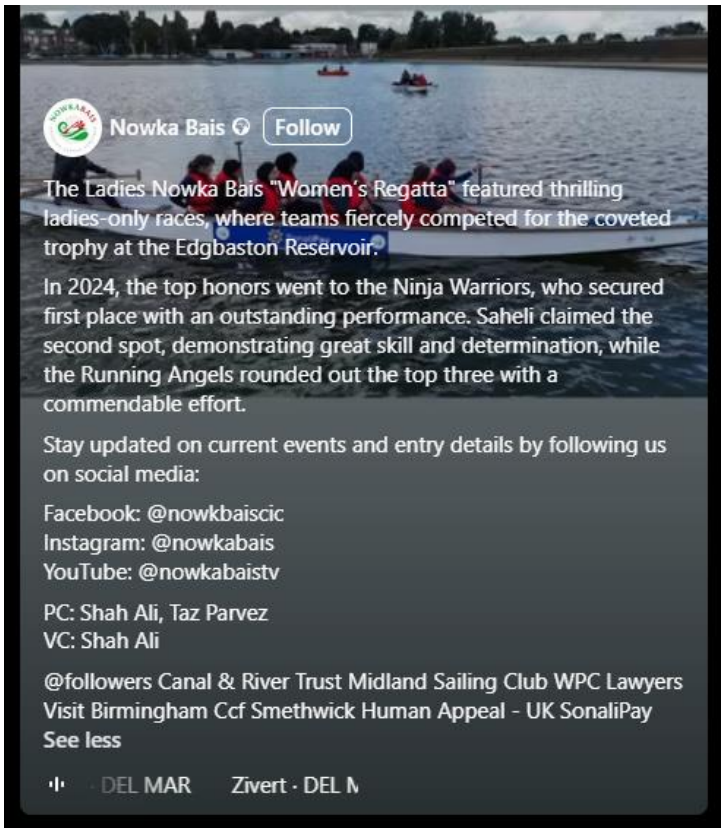
sketchavenue_ 9w •

Omg! I had no idea of these events!! I hope there is something I can catch! From another Bengali artist

Reply Hide

legacywestmidlands 9w • Author

@sketchavenue_ We have a poetry slam tomorrow at Midlands Arts Centre followed by our grande finale at the Birmingham Conservatoire with host Smash Bengali and performances by Tara Lily, members of CBSO and local artist Junayed. Visit the link in our bio for more details!



Challenges and Lessons Learned

This was a large-scale ambitious project with many project strands, partners and participants. In most cases the quality of communication between the parties involved made the difference in terms of the scale of the challenge and how successfully challenges were overcome.

Challenges around team illness impacting on delivery dates were solved through the support and collaboration between the partners, helping each other to find alternative venues and connecting new artists to the different project strands.

Regular steering group meetings for the project partners were key in ensuring good communication across the project and nurturing the relationships between the organisations. The relationships developed through those meetings also created many unexpected opportunities and benefits for those involved. In such a large and diverse partnership there were inevitable variations in the level of engagement, and the organisations that gave the most commitment to the steering group meetings and communication with the partnership and wider project network also benefited the most, as well as benefiting the other partners. What organisations got out of the partnership was proportionate to what they put in.

The project partners acknowledged that a clear memorandum of understanding agreed by all partners at the start of a partnership project would help to ensure that all partners were clear on the commitment required to the partnership, and may help to make the partnership contributions more equal. A partnership memorandum of understanding could include:

- Commitment to attend regular partnership meetings.
- Commitment to promote each others' events and activities through social media, mailing lists and other networks.
- Agreed deadlines for provision of event and activity dates, copy and images for marketing material and for data required for evaluation.
- Commitment to send out invitations to events to all partners as early as possible, and to make every effort to ensure every partner organisation is represented at every event.

There were particular communication challenges with one partner venue that made delivery of certain project strands a lot more stressful for those organisations. This unfortunately took time and energy away from delivery of the project and support for project participants. This was contrasted with incredibly positive support at other venues. Project partners agreed that the following measures would ensure better communication and working relationships between venues and production companies, particularly where community performers are involved, or it is a new kind of event for that venue and/or production company:

- Site visit and meeting between the production team and venue operation team as early as possible in the process.
- A clear single point of contact for the venue, and for the producing organisation, with all contact details shared and handovers carried out with any other staff who take on responsibilities for the production of the event.
- Technical specifications for the performance space and any guidance for use of any other spaces in the venue provided as early as possible (e.g. any limits on consumption of food in spaces, capacity for spaces etc)
- Technical specifications and other requirements for the production provided to the venue as early as possible in the process.
- Agreements on provision for dressing room/ green room spaces, particularly for larger community casts and for groups that may need a separate quiet space or prayer space.
- Event manual produced and shared as early as possible in the process to compile information gathered relevant to the points above. This will ensure all relevant information is held in one place and accessible for all staff within the venue and production company that may need to access it.
- Clear information for all fees and charges provided upfront, with all additional costs such as VAT, booking fees, contras, overtime staff rates etc. itemized to support projects to budget appropriately.
- Honest respectful communication between the venue team and production team when things are not working as expected.
- Prompt provision of any information requested by either party.

Conclusion

This ambitious project, and the majority of the activity delivered within the project's wide ranging and diverse program would not have been possible without the investment of the Inclusive Communities Fund, particularly the performance projects within the program.

The benefits of the partnership went beyond the opportunity to access funding, forging relationships that will have a legacy and potentially spark new projects in the future.

For the participants that had a deeper engagement with the project as performers, artists or event team members, the project has potentially been life changing, and has certainly contributed to positive mental health and wellbeing, increased confidence and opportunities for paid work, which for many of us working in the arts is the motivation for our work.

'a humbling and unforgettable experience that affirmed why we do what we do'

– Mukhtar Dar, Kalaboration Arts

Appendix A – Breakdown of data by project strand

	People engaging	Ticketed audiences	Volunteers under 25	Volunteers 26+	Family history participants	Children in green/blue spaces	Park tours attendance	Pupils hours	Rowers
BADA	525	477	31	21					
Handsworth Creative	1020		2	4		803	250	1381	
Kalaboration Arts	497	418	1	3					
Nowka Bais	501		10	6					435
Saathi House	677*	208	16	10	19			1620	
Simmer Down Arts	466	415	2	9					
Total	3686	1518	62	53	19	803	250	3001	435
Targets	3451	575	40	10	25	630	200	1890	137
Comparison to target	235	943	21	43	-6	173	50	1111	298

*People engaging with the project numbers include people beyond the categories within the project aims, such as professional artists. The Saathi House figure is significantly higher than the total of the other figures, as it includes 420 children and 20 teachers watching the show performed to full year groups at Prince Albert High School.