

Evaluation Report

September 2024

Overview of the programme

Our Home. Our Place. Our Space.



Photographer in Residence Lucy Hunter worked closely with residents from Walton for over a year, to explore their memories, current views and aspirations for their local area. This included working closely with a group of young people from Walton Youth and Community Project and Youth Worker Connor Wells.

Over this time, the young people's photography group, who all live locally, have been meeting weekly to experiment with different cameras and techniques to share their perspectives and experiences.

The group enjoyed regular photo walks, experimenting with shadow and slow movement, noticing the way the light and atmosphere changed as the sun began to set. They also focused on the people and places

which felt most important to them in their local area.

(Photograph taken by a young person)



Lucy worked with wider members of the community through initial engagement sessions with the social history group and free photo-walk workshops delivered in and around the local Spellow Library.

(Photograph taken by a young person)

Photographers Sarah Weights and Tricia Grant-Hanlon also assisted with the project, with Sarah also creating the design work for the exhibitions involved in the project.

This residency was part of the cultural interventions in the County Road Area, which is also part of Culture Liverpool's *Next Generation Neighbourhood Projects*.

The work was co-commissioned with the photography organisation, Open Eye Gallery.



(exhibition opening - Participants, WYP, Artists, Culture Liverpool)

Aims of the project

This commission took place at the early stages of working with the community to affect change and will sit alongside other creative commissions in the local area. The photography residency aimed to:

- To foster a sense of community ownership and pride in those who engaged with the artist
- Offer new skills to community members
- Produce high quality, free, creative workshops for the local community
- Provide long-term, deep engagement in the County Road Area



WYCP, Lucy Hunter, Tricia Grant Hanlon and Culture Liverpool team at Open Eye Gallery exhibition launch

Outputs and key stats

No: Sessions - Lucy delivered **21 engagement sessions** consisting of: 16 dedicated to working with the Walton Youth and Community project, and 5 with the wider community. Lucy engaged **166 participations** in total and 63 individual members of the community.

Online sharing: Lucy produced two blog articles, one to introduce the programme and one which acted more as a mid-term review of the project and as part of an in-conversation with assistant photographers Sarah Weights and Tricia Grant Hanlon. Both articles can be viewed on the Open Eye Gallery website via: <https://openeye.org.uk/blog/announcing-lucy-hunter-county-roads/> And <https://openeye.org.uk/blog/county-road-residency/>

Exhibitions:

The programme had a number of opportunities to present works in progress and final artwork through public realm and gallery showcases reaching a total of **19,840 audience members** as follows:

- April 2023 - Works in progress exhibition at Spellow Library - 812 audience members reached
- August 2023 - October 2023 - Local final exhibition at Spellow Library and public realm display using high street lamp street banners - 3020 audience members reached
- 29 September - 22 December 2023 - Gallery exhibition at Open Eye Gallery, part of the group exhibition 'A Place of our Own' = 16,008 audience members reached

Sector Discussion

Culture Liverpool and Open Eye Gallery also delivered a round table learning event, Creative Neighbourhoods which took place on 27 November 2023. The event brought together artist, commissioners, community members and key stakeholders to explore how socially engaged approaches to arts engagement can better enable local residents to shape and share what matters to them about their local area. The event took place

within the gallery whilst the *A Place of Our Own* exhibition (featuring the Walton project) was on display. 35 people attended the closed event and a print and digital publication of the discussion was created for wider dissemination, with over **210 views** so far on our issuu account.

The publication featured a reflective essay by Lauren Stephens, Philosopher in Residence at Open Eye Gallery and a PhD researcher in the philosophy of art at the University of Liverpool, and illustrated by artist Tasha Whittle.



Reflecting on Creative Neighbourhoods

An Introduction by Liz Wewiora, Head of Social Practice (Open Eye Gallery), and Jess O'Neill, Creative Community Engagement Officer (Culture Liverpool)

Culture Liverpool and Open Eye Gallery are delighted to share the findings of a round table learning event - Creative Neighbourhoods which took place on 27th November, 2023. The event brought together artists, commissioners, community members and key stakeholders, to explore how socially engaged approaches to arts engagement can better enable local residents to shape and share what matters to them about their local area.

The event took place within Open Eye Gallery's venue, which featured an exhibition called **A Place of Our Own**. The exhibition featured two Historic England Picturing High Streets projects with photographer Tony Mallon and the Prescott Photography Club, in collaboration with Knowsley Council, and work by photographer Suzanne St Clare and Chester Traders, in collaboration with Chester and Cheshire West Council.

The exhibition also included work from **Our Home. Our Place. Our Space**; a Liverpool City Council's County District Centre scheme project, featuring photographers Lucy Hunter, Sarah Weights, Tricia Grant-Hanlon, Walton residents and young people from Walton Youth and Community project.

For the day's event, we also showed a pop up display of another Culture Liverpool project, **Croxteth Speaks** delivered by All Things Considered Theatre. After having time to look at the work, we invited guests to the round table discussion about the key themes emerging from the projects and explored the value of these practices.

This publication gives an overview of each project and shares the reflections from the day, shared through Open Eye Gallery's philosopher in residence Lauren Stephens and illustrated and designed by artist Tasha Whittle.

Insert from Creative Neighbourhoods publication

A digital copy of the publication can be found:

https://issuu.com/openeyegallery/docs/reflecting_on_creative_neighbourhoods_open_eye_g

To what extent were the project aims achieved?

To foster a sense of community ownership and pride in those who engaged with the artist

In an interview with the project artist Lucy Hunter, she reflected a a result of the project,

“The YP group just seemed much more confident in their own local place - they started to take ownership of the sessions, they led the way about where they were exploring in their own local area - they engaged with where they were living more, it felt like it was their neighbourhood - they seemed pride of what they were doing and where they were from”.

Participants directly reflected they felt more connected to their local area as a result of the project, with young people involved highlighting stronger connections to the **‘high street and Walton Park’**.

Lucy added the group took a real sense of ownership of the project, *“The YP group just seemed much more confident in their own local place - they started to take ownership of the sessions, they led the way about where they were exploring in their own local area - they engaged with where they were living more, it felt like it was their neighbourhood - they seemed pride of what they were doing and where they were from”.*

Lucy also engaged with the wider community through a series of public photo-walks and reflected a shift in community pride and investment in their local area as a result:

“We’d go on walks and suddenly find new things about their local neighbourhood and take a new sense of pride about their local area - looking at it in different ways and exploring the area a bit more eg. local green spaces, local history elements, being out socially in a group which would encourage the local community to enquire about what they were doing and also take an interest”

The exhibition at Open Eye Gallery also gave the public a chance to reflect upon their knowledge of perceptions of the Walton area, **“The exhibition was a lot more nuanced than I thought it was going to be and gave a real sense of colour and bright positivity about the place, a totally different perspective of Walton”.**



(Photograph taken by young person)

The exhibition launch event at Open Eye Gallery also gave local residents the opportunity to share their pride in their local area to audience attending the event. 6 group members showed up for the opening night of the exhibition and some bought parents with them.

Lucy Hunter reflected, *“They were immensely proud of their work and I witnessed a number of them speaking about their work to friends, family and strangers”*.

Offer new skills to community members & produce high quality, free, creative workshops for the local community

Lucy Hunter supported residents from across Walton, and young people and staff from the Walton youth and community project, to develop a series of new creative and technical photography skills which the young people highlighting, '*bubble photography and light photography*' as the most popular.



(Photograph taken by young person)

63 individual members of the community engaged in quality, free and creative workshop activity, and activities didn't just focus on the technical aspects of photography, but introduced people to alternative and playful ways of using the medium to explore their local area, as evidenced in the final work produced.

The young people made some strong photographic works highlighting this new skill but the project also supported participants in wider transferable skills - building self-confidence, social and communication skills.

Artist Lucy Hunter reflected, *“Receiving feedback about their images was also a massive part of the project and really helped the more quiet/ shy YP chat and a real sense of pride when they got nice feedback from their peers”*

There was an initial aim to work with a broader range of residents in a similar way to the Walton youth and community project but given the commissioning timeframe, it was agreed Lucy should focus in on that specific group and give them dedicated time to co-produce a new body of work.

Lucy reflected if she could have worked on a larger scale or longer term programme in Walton she would have enjoyed doing more with the *“The church and their history days, cleaning up the church yard days etc - bell ringers and volunteers more religious side of the church and maybe the local businesses exploring local cafes as meeting spaces”*.

- **Provide long-term, deep engagement in the County Road Area**

The work with Walton Youth and Community project demonstrated a long-term and in-depth level of engagement and Lucy continues to keep in touch with the community to date. Some longer term impacts also emerged as a result of this way of working in the shift of the young people involved:

Lucy reflected,

“One of the YP who has autism and doesn’t really speak in the room - made some incredible images and people fed back how strong they were in the gallery on the opening night and she has her own portfolio of work now which is really important for her”.

Moreover, a number of the young people involved in the project, some of whom had never shown an interest in photography before reflected, *“I want to study photography at school”* now showing a tangible shift in confidence and aspiration to use a creative subject in their future lives.

The project budget allowed for cameras to be purchased to be used permanently for the community to support Walton youth and community project to continue using photography long term.



(exhibition opening evening)

Reflections on the commissioning partners and artist experience for future commissions:

***Identifying local role models in Walton and gaps in provision:**

In her final evaluation interview artist Lucy Hunter and supporting artist Tricia Grant-Hanlon identified some key community connectors, including Culture Liverpool,

Right from the off, Culture Liverpool, were quite proactive in linking me in with the community, meeting with the Vicar at the local church who then linked me into other areas - some didn't seem right for the project longer term, but others were great to be linked in.

Everton in the community had so much work going on with them and lots of funding etc - they maybe weren't a best placed group to work with, so it was about working with those groups that maybe weren't already focused on.

Just from spending time in the library at local open days was useful to link in with people - so the library as a space was key

And of course Walton youth and community project - they do so much help the local community but they can't work for the entire community, so these are definite gaps

I identified gaps in stable education for the local community, issues around food security, financial security - and walton youth were really picking up the slack for these gaps in the community

These are areas for consideration for future engagement which Culture Liverpool and Open Eye Gallery could, therefore, consider in future commissioning where appropriate.

The structure and timeframe of the commission

Lucy reflected, that for working specifically with the young people the project felt like a good timeframe but to work with the wider community in the same depth would have needed a longer term commission:

"I think working specifically with the YP it was actually an okay amount of time as the nature of that age group means you can only work for so long for them as they move on etc,

In terms of the wider community I feel like I barely touched the surface and could have done more with the history group and local businesses but that would need another year"

Lucy also reflected she felt she did more than what she was technically paid for, in terms of working hours, but that it was her '*decision to do that*'. This does seem a recurring reflection that happens in socially engaged projects and so would welcome future discussions between commissioners in terms of how budgets may offer flex or buffer with this in mind.

END