



CASE STUDY: Colchester Chinese Cultural Society



Cultural Organisation Group:

Colchester Chinese Cultural Society

Sector: Community Engagement

Key groups targeted by this project: All

Author: Culture team, Essex County Council

Delivery period of project:
Spring 2022 – January 2023



INTRODUCTION

The Colchester Chinese Culture Society (CCCS) is a non-profit Community Interest Company formed in April 2004 and was established to work for the benefit of the local Chinese community in Colchester, and its integration into local and regional society in Essex.

The CCCS works to promote Chinese community life and to foster interaction with other community groups and works with a range of cultural partners including Essex Book Festival, Essex County Council Cultural Development, Firstsite Gallery, Jaywick Martello Tower, Active Essex, Signals Media Arts, Mercury theatre, Colchester Arts Centre and Essex Cultural Diversity Project (ECDP).

For over 15 years CCCS has developed a range of cultural, education and community engagement activities with the aim of promoting Chinese culture and art amongst its members and the public in Colchester and far beyond. For many years it ran a Chinese language and cultural school for children of Chinese heritage and other interested locals.

The society has produced and presented a wide range of arts and cultural activities nationally and internationally. These have included: Chinese New Year Celebrations; Concert of UK Chinese Music Ensemble; Japanese Erhu Orchestra and appearances on the international stage, such as X-Factor.

Partnerships have been developed to enable the society to access a wider range of artistic activities, including the Mercury theatre; Essex County Council Music Hub and Arts Development Team; Colchester Borough Council; Firstsite Gallery and the EDCP.

Over the years, the CCCS has received numerous awards and funds such as Arts Council England; ECC's Chairman's Award; Lottery Awards for All and High Sheriff's Award.

Due to her vast experience of managing similar projects and small grants – such as from ECC, Colchester Borough Council and Arts Council England - Simone Xue, CCCS Project manager, took responsibility for managing the day-to-day delivery of the project.

Simone has a background in public finance and currently works as an accounting technician for ECC's Finance Professional Services department. As the chairperson CCCS, she has a wide range of experience including strategic planning, project management, fundraising and administration. Simone has a great interest in art, particularly in Chinese art such as brush painting, Chinese calligraphy and paper cutting.

The “Challenge” or “Opportunity”

The Essex Cultural Diversity Project had highlighted that the Tendring district had been referred by Arts Council England's Levelling Up for Culture Places and Priority Place as being high on its priority list for its low engagement in the arts and cultural sector.

In fact, Tendring has the lowest cultural engagement with diverse communities taking part in the arts and the CCCS identified that the Chinese community in Essex as a whole, is the least engaged with in relation to the arts and heritage sector due to the lack of opportunities, funding and networking and the language barrier.

The project engaged with the long-established Chinese communities in Colchester and Tendring. Historically these communities have been very isolated and mostly engaged with local businesses, the self-employed and those working in the catering sector.

Chinese communities in Essex, especially the Tendring area, have been severely affected by the pandemic and have been victims of hate crime and racial abuse since the lockdown.

Through the project, CCCS have showcased not only the best of Chinese culture and shared its traditions, customs and cultures with diverse and non-diverse audiences but they have also been successful in attracting a wide range of audiences who had limited or no knowledge of Chinese Culture.

Why the practitioner chose to partner with ECC

Through the Arts and Cultural fund, CCCS have embarked on a five-month programme of activity that has supported and engaged with diverse communities in Tendring, has worked in partnership with the Essex Cultural Diversity Project, and has taken part in a series of events and activities which have led to further engagement and participation in the arts.

Through the project 'Arts Tendring', the workshops and masterclasses have encouraged people to participate and engage with Chinese artists through various artforms including dance, music and visual arts.

The programme featured community events and participation and engagement workshops, including Tai Chi, calligraphy, Chinese drumming and dance which engaged with all ages - from the young to the elderly - and which supported mental health and well-being through the arts.

Without the ECC Arts and Cultural Fund, and the support from Essex Cultural Diversity Project, 'Arts Tendring' would not have been delivered.

The Results

During the Queen's Jubilee celebrations in June 2022, the CCCS hosted two events on the bank holiday weekend

Bhaji on the Beach saw the CCCS work with the Essex Bangladeshi Women's Association who took part in two days of Jubilee celebrations. CCCS also held the Beach picnic at Jaywick Sands with cultural activities and food cooked by various diverse community groups. The event attracted 650 people and was open to all communities and featured on both the BBC Look East and ITV Anglia News programmes.

In Jaywick and Harwich, the Jubilee Street Party attracted 450 visitors and involved music and dance and celebrated the diverse communities in Tendring with bunting. The event was open to all communities and encouraged different cultures to share traditions as part of this landmark in history.

Also, the CCCS organised The Festival of Jiangsu and Tendring which saw the UK exhibition hosted by the Harwich Arts and Heritage Centre, while the China exhibition was held at Qingyun Gallery in Changzhou city in Jiangsu province.

The festival follows on from last year's online festival of Colchester and Jiangsu, which saw Essex based Chinese artists and artists in China collaborating through online platforms, due to Covid-19 restrictions, to deliver a week-long culture festival.

The launch of the festival took place on Sunday 6 November at Harwich Arts and Heritage Centre and was attended by ECC's Cabinet Member for Devolution, the Arts Heritage and Culture, Councillor Graham Butland, along with delegates and dignitaries from the Harwich and Chinese communities as well as almost 800 attendees. It was also launched on a Metaverse platform and reached an audience of 60,000.

Having showcased the best of Chinese culture and its traditions and customs with diverse and non-diverse audiences, the CCCS have been successful in attracting a wide range of audiences who had limited or no knowledge of Chinese culture.

As part of CCCS's audience development they collected information and feedback from both the artists, practitioners and audiences. This helped both new partners and CCCS to better understand interest and demand for diverse programming in the Essex and gain audience feedback to assess how they perceive the quality of performances.



Testimonials

Simone Xue, CCCS Project Delivery manager, said:
 “The support from ECC’s Arts and Cultural Fund has provided us the opportunity to further expand our work in Tendring and reach out to new audiences to deliver diverse programming in new venues, including Harwich Arts Centre, outdoors spaces at Jaywick Sands and working with a range of partners in Essex.”



GETTING INVOLVED

Here at Essex County Council, we are passionate about arts and culture and keen to support projects across the county. If you have an idea you would like to share with us, take a look at the Arts and Cultural Fund page on the Explore Essex website: www.explore-essex.com/culture/arts-culture-fund and get in touch via email: culture@essex.gov.uk