

# CULTURE ESSEX

## ARTS AND CULTURE CASE STUDY: Essex Cultural Diversity Project



**Cultural Organisation Group:**

Essex Cultural Diversity Project

**Sector:** Cultural Diversity

**Key groups targeted by this project:** All

**Video:** <https://youtu.be/aWK3rGhmtol>

**Author:** Culture team, Essex County Council





## INTRODUCTION

**The Essex Cultural Diversity Project (ECDP)** has a vision to energise cultural diversity in the arts and heritage sectors, creating and stimulating opportunities and providing a focal point for the development and co-ordination of cultural diversity through arts and heritage activity.

ECDP was established in 2008 following a feasibility study commissioned by Arts Council England and Essex County Council (ECC) to investigate the need for an arts programme focused on cultural diversity in Essex. The study found that work was urgently needed to support BAME artists and arts organisations, as well as strategic organisations to address cultural diversity in the arts and heritage sectors.

Now a registered charity and Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, ECDP works across cultural sectors, building partnerships with artists, arts organisations, museums and libraries to promote culturally diverse work.

## THE STORY OF ESSEX CULTURAL DIVERSITY PROJECT

ECDP works with artists, the culture and heritage sectors, the BAME community and the voluntary sector to help develop skills, build sustainable networks and supportive infrastructures and create new opportunities to enhance diverse creative practitioners' profile.

With many years of experience developing outreach and engagement programmes with a wide range of partners, ECDP stages accessible and vibrant cultural and heritage events in public locations, including the Global Village model - an adaptable artist driven platform for increasing audience engagement with broader cultural diversity.

With a small core team, ECDP covers a wide geographical area covering Essex and increasingly Norfolk and Suffolk, working with some of the least engaged communities in Essex. Recent examples include the Chelmsford Mosque on holiday hunger programs, the Essex Multi Cultural Activities Network (EMAN) with Muslim women on heritage programmes and the Bangladeshi Women's Association on public events. During the height of the pandemic ECDP also played a key role in encouraging sometimes reticent ethnic minority communities to get vaccinated.



## GLOBAL VILLAGE

Global Village is a diverse, focused, well established and respected arts and culture programme developed by ECDP over 13 years, focusing on performance and participatory activities that take place in public spaces and festivals. This provides opportunities not only for audiences and participants to experience diverse focused arts and cultural activities and performances but also provides an important platform for emerging diverse arts and cultural organisations and individuals.

Early iterations featured as part of Metal's Village Green Festival in Southend-on-Sea and now showcases diverse artists and performances in the heart of communities in country parks and town centers, providing a stage for artists from minority ethnic communities to perform. The model has travelled around Essex and Norfolk as well as further afield such as at the Belfast Mela and has reached as far as Hungary.

Over the years ECDP have expanded Global Village, providing diverse arts practitioners the opportunity to work in schools and run cultural workshops in residential care homes providing cultural workshops to facilitate a better understanding of diverse care workers with elderly residents. Sporting events meanwhile include taking diverse cultural activities to Essex Cricket Club to provide additional content along with domestic and international fixtures.

## THE "CHALLENGE" OR "OPPORTUNITY"

The Glover Landscape Review, commissioned by the CPRE Countryside Charity, recognised the need for "programmes to increase the ethnic diversity of visitors" to nature and open spaces.

One of ECDP's key strands of work is to therefore explore diversity in relation to the environmental sectors, access to nature, coasts, and rural areas and challenging the significant barriers that people of color experience in terms of access, engagement and enjoyment.

ECDP intend to make a difference through networks such as the Essex Local Nature Partnership, working with major partners including Natural England, Essex County Council, the Wildlife Trust and many others to harness the power of cultural engagement to tackle wider entrenched barriers.

In addition to this, work in green spaces has greater importance when considering that the Covid-19 pandemic created a public and mental health challenge whereby BAME communities were particularly badly affected. Isolation, lack of access to services and community support meant that more needs to be done to improve connectivity to parks and/or open spaces and associated activities that are good for health and wellbeing and that are free of charge.



## WHY THE GROUP OR PRACTITIONER CHOSE TO PARTNER WITH ECC

ECC culture has been a key partner with ECDP since its inception, hosting the organisation during its formation in 2008 and working with them ever since, from initiatives such as encouraging applications to ECC's Arts and Cultural Fund to directly supporting and funding projects.

ECDP chose to partner with ECC on the Global Village programme, this is due to ECC's long standing relationship and the fact it manages a broad range of country parks and green spaces, means ECDP can test and develop the Global Village model.

## THE RESULTS

ECC has supported the Global Village programme since 2021 where ECC match funded a bespoke version of the Global Village programme as part of an Arts Council England bid by ECDP. As the U.K. emerged from lockdown, the bid focused on creating a mobile and diverse performance arena to travel to outdoor parks and green spaces across Essex, engaging with diverse communities to provide new experiences and develop awareness of open spaces available to everyone.

The aims of the project were to ensure that accessible green spaces are endowed with a clear sense of creativity; offering new opportunities to increase artist and community engagement with minority ethnic communities; enabling improved cultural engagement with diverse audiences; improve health and wellbeing outcomes particularly for BAME communities and increase connectivity with parks and open spaces and the natural environment.

This initial programme was delivered across four ECC sites - Belhus Woods, Danbury, Cudmore Grove Country Parks and Cressing Temple Barns – and by working with minority ethnic groups in bespoke engagement sessions in these settings led to a celebratory performance at Cressing Temple Barns.

The programme galvanised and gave confidence to culturally diverse artists and organisations to perform and develop their practice and saw Capoeira, Africa Drumming, Tai Chi and Bhangra groups perform.

Following from the success of the 2021 programme, ECC funded ECDP in 2022 to deliver a one-day Global Village event with performances from a broad range of culturally diverse groups and performers which attracted an audience of over 500 visitors to Hadleigh Country Park.

This was again built upon in 2023 at Hadleigh, where ECDP worked with the ECC Culture team to host the prestigious Circus Raj with three performances over one day at the end of the school summer holidays. The free activity offered during the cost-of-living crisis provided important free activities to families and had an attendance that exceeded the organisers expectations with over 600 attending (200 people at each of the performances).

### **Please tell us any results so far of the work with the communities / workshop attendees / residents involved with the project**

In September 2023 ECDP held an engagement event in Rochford to look at people's experiences of working on the Global Village and its future. With representatives from Essex's Chinese, Afro-Caribbean and Bangladeshi communities, strong themes emerged of the programme such as building confidence for BAME communities to perform and develop their practice and communities and 'seeing' their cultures for the first time being celebrated in public spaces.

"ECDP trusted us to turn up and do what we do at Global Village. That trust was invaluable in giving us confidence to take to other organisations and events."

"These kind of event and connections change people's lives. I remember seeing Global Village and for the first time feeling a sense of belonging and pride that diverse cultures were being celebrated in this way."

## 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 here: [www.explore-essex.com/culture/arts-culture-fund](http://www.explore-essex.com/culture/arts-culture-fund) and get in touch via email us: [culture@essex.gov.uk](mailto:culture@essex.gov.uk)