

ARTS AND CULTURE CASE STUDY: The Art Box, Sharon Rawlinson



Cultural Organisation Group:

Sharon Rawlinson, 'The Art Box'

Sector: Education

Key groups targeted by this project:

Children and young people in Tendring, Essex

Author: Cultural Development Team,
Essex County Council

Delivery period of project:

Summer – Autumn 2022

THE ART BOX:

Mobile creative workshops delivered directly to the community

INTRODUCTION

Sharon Rawlinson is a creative practitioner in Manningtree, Essex, working across painting, photography and film, as well as delivering community art projects. Her interest in site specific initiatives led to the launch of 'The Art Box', a travelling art studio which enables the delivery of accessible creative workshop opportunities to those in areas of low arts engagement, prioritising children and young people in Jaywick and Clacton-on-Sea. Through the Arts and Cultural Fund, the project has been enabled to deliver workshops at festivals, events, community projects and schools to inspire creativity and wellbeing through access to culture.

THE STORY OF SHARON RAWLINSON

As well as maintaining her visual arts practice rooted in her surroundings, Sharon has worked closely on several community art projects with The Grand Theatre of Lemmings. Over the past six years, this has spanned projects including a touring project across Essex libraries called '*George the Bookworm*' (2021) and an annual Christmas advent window display in Manningtree, Essex. The latter included her working as the lead artist to create a series of illuminated window displays with, and for, the local community and businesses to instill a sense of place and pride in response to the heritage of the town. This was combined with creative workshops for children on how to make willow lanterns and a participatory 'illumination parade', centering the outcome of these workshops and an opportunity for children and their families to come together and celebrate their achievements and participation in the project.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The primary opportunity that emerged from this project was for Sharon to extend her professional development by leading her own independent community art project based on a sustainable model to engage a targeted group. This included support for a mobile creative engagement facility that could bring workshops, resources and opportunities directly to children and young people in areas of low engagement across Tendring. This was achieved by specifically targeting accessible community projects and events with a known following such as the Clacton Airshow and Brightlingsea Fresh Air Festival. Importantly, Sharon indicated that it was imperative to offer workshops for free at point of delivery, which would not have been possible without receipt of the Arts and Cultural Fund, ensuring that the project was sustainable from the perspective of both the practitioner and audience.

WHY THE GROUP OR PRACTITIONER CHOSE TO PARTNER WITH ECC

In applying for the Arts and Cultural Fund, Sharon identified how this relationship could be best placed to help her develop creative workshops for groups who wouldn't normally have access to the arts or the artistic process: "Having the backing of ECC gives the prestige and professionalism needed when approaching different groups on a first-time basis. It has also enabled me to offer workshops to groups that I wouldn't normally have the confidence to approach or ask. Now that I have tested my ideas and workshops, I know that it is a viable, sustainable method of delivery to a target audience. Having ECC as a project partner has given me confidence that 'The Art Box' be even more successful as it grows in future years."

HOW THE ECC CULTURE TEAM RESPONDED

Sharon Rawlinson's application to the Arts and Cultural Fund clearly outlined the social impact of her project with the Essex residents it aimed to engage by ways of utilising a model for working that initiated creative workshops and opportunities directly on their doorstep. Importantly, the project provided ways to explore creative expression of their environment and identity using sustainable and environmentally conscious methods. In addition to awarding this project funding, the ECC culture team has supported the project via regular meetings and by offering assistance wherever needed in terms of marketing, PR and general project advice.

THE RESULTS

The feedback from the public and project participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Many of the participants on the 'doodle art' workshop enjoyed picking out the relevant hand drawn images that were iconic to the town. By choosing an image to colour in they found a community art project such as this "gave a great sense of being" and "pride in where they lived". Many participants subsequently asked that the finished artworks be displayed in their local library to continue the legacy of community pride. In fact, following the success at the Brightlingsea Open Air Festival, a local councillor has arranged for the display of the workshop artworks across shop windows in Brightlingsea later this year.

Sharon Rawlinson, Arts and Cultural Fund recipient, said: "I am delighted to be part of the first round of ECC Arts and Cultural Fund and looking forward to the opportunities to further my artistic practice whilst providing workshops to those in low provision areas. The money that you have given to my project has helped so many people already and will continue to do so."



Images: 'The Art Box' at Brightlingsea Open Air Festival, October 2022.

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 and get in touch via email us: culture@essex.gov.uk