



RIGHT UP OUR STREET (DONCASTER)

# CREATIVE AND PEOPLE PLACES

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN THE ARTS



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**





## ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

# IN THE ARTS

### CASE STUDY THEMES

- > Grassroots development
- > Community engagement
- > Use of non-arts venues

## PROJECT SUMMARY

Right Up Our Street (RUOS) is a three year programme in Doncaster funded by the Arts Council England's Creative People and Places (CPP) programme. With a 10 year vision for producing inspiring art with focussed community engagement, RUOS has three strands of activity: D strand - large scale performance events; N strand – a series of commissions responding to what communities want; and A strand - where professional artists work in communities as Arts Supporters to engage local people in grassroots development. Each strand facilitates different levels of community decision-making and involvement.<sup>1</sup>

**“Throughout the development and design of Right Up**

**Our Street we have held firm to the belief that if it's to succeed, our programme needs to be a dialogue between communities and artists”.** RUOS Business Plan

This case study focuses on the development of a Community Team and arts programme in Balby, one of the communities chosen to take part in the A strand. Since September 2013, an Arts Supporter has been working in the area to engage the local community in a range of arts activities. Drawing on interviews with programme staff (including the Arts Supporter), Community Team members and a partner working on one of the N strand commissions, this case study summarises what has been achieved by the RUOS programme in Balby to date.

## KEY FINDINGS

- › **Grassroots development** has been a success, reaching out to the local community and supporting a group to create a programme of engaging art for the area; the success of which is demonstrated by local people's interest in and willingness to become involved. The work is helping to change people's perceptions about where they live and what happens there. Those most closely involved have benefited in a variety of ways, particularly in increased confidence, both to develop arts in the area and pursue new opportunities in everyday life.
- › The **Arts Supporter** played a key role, driving and steering forward the arts activities by becoming a trusted friend and challenging people's preconceptions about the arts, raising the bar in terms of what people want to engage in creatively.
- › Establishing and maintaining a **Community Team** helps to make links locally but it takes time to build relationships and trust in communities (in this case it was about a year for the group to build confidence and be able to make a meaningful contribution), which needs to be built into programme planning and delivery.
- › Use of a familiar but non arts space (in this case a library) has been a win-win, increasing engagement and sustainability both in the arts and for the library itself.



## INTRODUCTION

Prior to CPP, Doncaster was ranked by the Active People Survey as being 274th out of 282 local authorities in terms of engagement in the arts. RUOS designed three separate but mutually supportive strands of activity to radically transform this picture by engaging just under 20% of the borough's population over the course of the programme.

- Strand D is the 'big bang', 3 large scale, high quality performance events, designed to surprise, inspire and encapsulate the spirit of Doncaster.
- The N Strand is a series of commissions driven by local communities and artists and supported by external expertise, new collaborations and conversations.
- A strand is focused on 5 areas, chosen through consultation with the Borough's five neighbourhood teams, and involves an artist (the Arts Supporter) working alongside local volunteers (the Community Team) to engage the community, develop confidence and enthusiasm for the arts and try to overcome any barriers to engagement.



## APPROACH TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Doncaster has been described as a diverse place with a strong sense of identity in specific communities, bringing challenges (in terms of reaching out to communities, exploring what they would like and getting them to take the time to come along), and opportunities to work locally; developing focused and tailored plans for individual communities. Each area had a vibrant sense of community spirit and key individuals who would be willing to get involved and try new things. An Arts Supporter was appointed for each area and is key to the successful delivery of the A strand, with responsibility for establishing and supporting a Community Team, developing a focal point for activity (Arts Base), delivering an artistic programme and engaging with the wider community.

**A key part of the role is to drive and connect but to do this in partnership with the community” Arts Supporter.**

The model of grassroots development works by having someone on the ground (the Arts Supporter), connecting people and driving forward ideas from the Community Team. Arts Supporters took time to get to know people, which caused some frustrations with the speed with which art was delivered, but it was also an effective method of engaging new audiences and an essential basis from which to move forwards with the artistic programme.

**“It is not enough to have a good idea – there has to also be a mechanism to make it work in a specific community” Arts Supporter.**

Arts Supporters had to be especially creative when reaching out to local communities and bringing them together through art. To try and reach people who do not tend to engage with the arts, Arts Supporters set out to make conversation in locations where they go in day-to-day life, such as the job centre or the GP surgery.

In Balby, an early meeting revealed that the community library wanted to be involved so the Arts Supporter decided to use the library as her Arts Base to provide a focal point for activity (“art would happen there”), which has helped the library to reposition itself, increasing footfall and use.

**“Kate’s work has helped to increase footfall and got more people interested in the library.... People see that it is much more than just a place to borrow books.” Community Team member.**

The first activity was upcycling workshops designed as a way to inspire people and for them to get something tangible out of art. There wasn’t a lot of money in the area and by using local charity shops to buy materials participants could add value to objects and clothing. The workshops provided an opportunity to build trust and start conversations which enabled the Arts Supporter to gain a better understanding of the area and its needs. The aim was for the project to be self-sustaining longer term. A Community Team was created which consists of a core group of around 12 local people, including 3 who also volunteer in the running of the library. It meets formally once a month to evaluate and forward plan, but members keep in touch and arrange additional meetings if required.

The Arts Supporter helped the team to reach out further, developing projects that local people and groups can contribute to, based around familiar themes or settings. This has included the Field of Poppies (a project involving contributions from 650 local people that was installed outside the library) providing a spectacle and source of pride for the area. The theme of the First World War was suggested by the Community Team by 2014 and the Arts Supporter came up with the idea of the poppies, drawing on her expertise in visual arts to shape the project into something of high artistic quality. Levels of engagement demonstrated a keen interest amongst local people in being part of something that starts with the personal and familiar but builds into something of artistic significance. The Community Team has also developed positive links with one of the N Strand commissions (a play ‘Only Water Between’ with local significance as it tells the story of a couple from Balby who were separated by the First World War). The library hosted the first performance which was a great success and a significant step for the library as it was the first time it had ever hosted such an event.

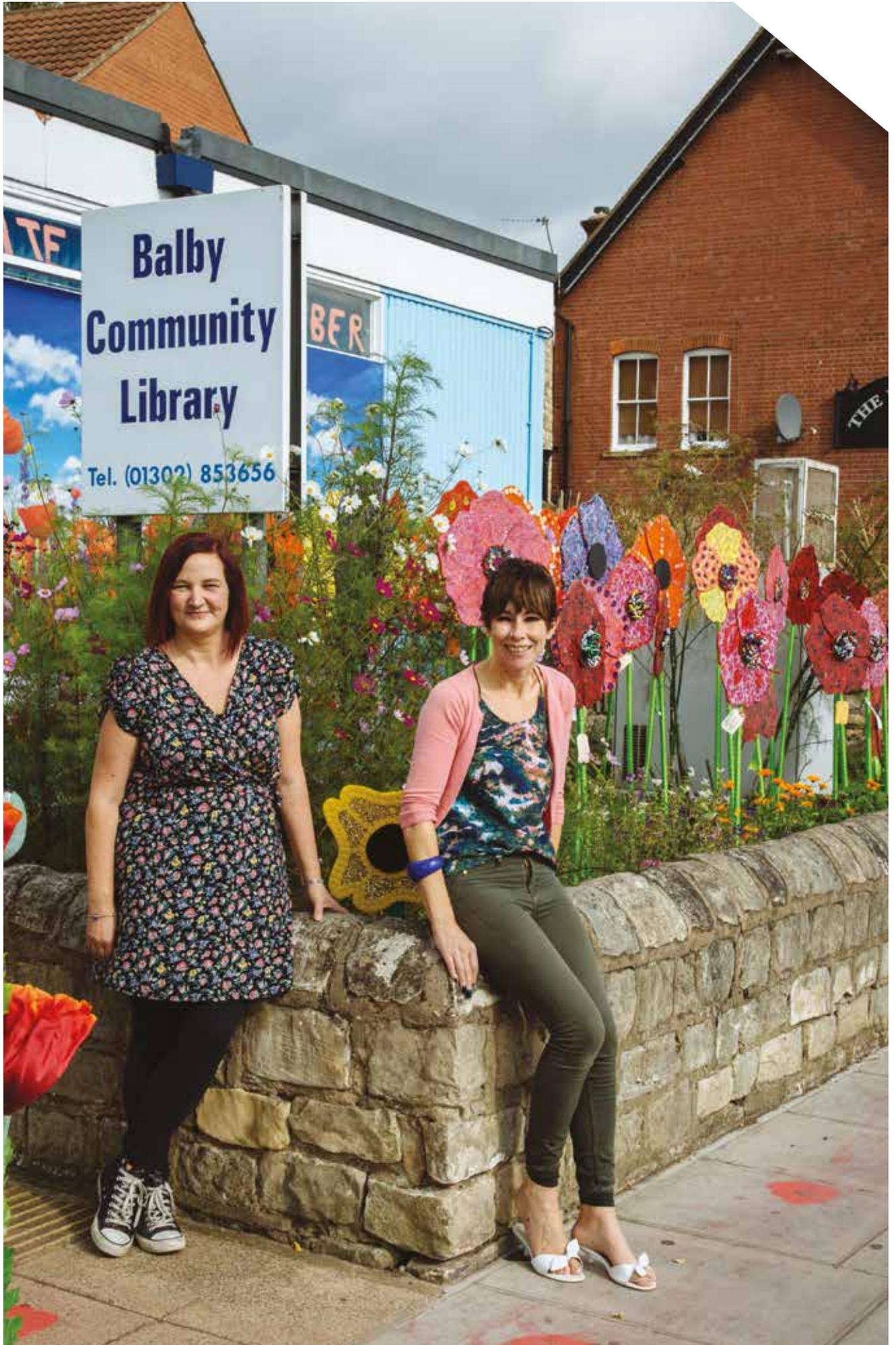
**“Only Water Between was full to capacity – local people now see the library as a focal point for activity” Community Team member.**



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## WHAT WORKED WELL?

- › **Linking in with Balby Library** offered the Arts Supporter an accessible location from which to create art that is familiar and particularly suits the family sessions. It has also helped to give the library a new lease of life and prompted further action from its volunteers, for example, the plan to paint a mural designed by local school children on the wall. As a strategy, this relationship helps to build the sustainability of both the arts activity and the library.
- › **Building a community team** has involved working to engage a small but diverse group of people with different skills and interests, generating lots of ideas and a network of opportunities for creating art, learning and socialising. **By working in depth with a small number of people** to build their capacity and challenge preconceptions of the arts as “not for us” and make art central to people’s lives in Balby, they are becoming advocates for the arts in their communities.
- › To reach a larger number of people it is vital that the Arts Supporter is not seen as solely in residence at the library, so **the Arts Supporter tries to engage people in conversations in other locations** as well as **developing interactive creative activity that allows people to get involved and conversations to happen**. The Balby Field of Poppies project provides the breadth of engagement alongside the depth resulting from the ongoing involvement of the Community Team.



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## LESSONS LEARNT:

- › The time needed to develop a detailed business plan following confirmation of the funding award plus the time to set up the community teams, meant that **some early momentum was lost** as it was **difficult to maintain interest and dialogue during this period of no activity**.
- › **There is scope to ensure community teams are more representative**, for example by attracting an increasing range of younger and older residents. The Arts Supporter is mindful of the balance between maintaining continuity to build capacity and the need to refresh the voices heard, to prevent a clique forming.
- › **Low levels of interest from the local press** have been a source of disappointment and highlight the challenge of profiling art in communities. This remains a challenge for the RUOS communications team and for CPP nationally.

## TOP TIPS:

- › **Take the arts to non arts spaces** and use the opportunity to ask people what art they would like to do and see locally.
- › Community Teams provide a diverse range of skills and opinions so should take the opportunity to **learn from each other and not be afraid to challenge**.
- › Projects should aim to **use the familiar to engage new people**, allow for mass participation but then push artistic boundaries in the creation of the final artistic product.

## OUTCOMES

- › More people from Balby are engaged with and being inspired by the arts, for example around 650 people contributed to the Poppies project and up to 50-60 people regularly attend activities held in the library. One of the Community Team members has set up a guitar group helping people to realise their ambitions; one member has just recorded her first single and has been inspired to write her own songs.
- › Before RUOS, staff at the library tried to run workshops there but struggled to maintain local interest. Interviews with volunteers suggest that, anecdotally, RUOS has attracted more people and a wider group of people to the library, including those from outside of the area.
- › The Balby Community Team has grown in confidence and is now better able to express opinions and raise questions about potential arts activities. Members of the Balby Community Team said they got more from being part of the group than they expected, had skills they did not realise they had and encouraged friends to get involved as a result of their enthusiasm.
- › RUOS has enabled people to see the arts in a broader sense (art can be many things) and conversations are starting to happen. The Arts Supporter hopes that the legacy will be that people recognise the many ways that it is possible to engage with the arts.
- › DICE, a local social enterprise that was set up around the same time as RUOS to work with adults and young people with disabilities, has been involved in the Community Team and feels that RUOS has supported its success and also influenced its direction towards the arts.



## PERSONAL JOURNEYS

Chelsea was previously a stay at home mum but met the Arts Supporter at an open day around 18 months ago and this reignited a passion for the arts, which she had previously developed by studying fashion at college but put on hold when she had children. She enjoys being part of the Community Team because it is flexible and she can do things in her own time. Having helped the Arts Supporter to develop the upcycling workshops and set up the Facebook group (Balby RUOS), she became a community champion and now attends advisory group meetings involving representatives from each area, the council and other partners. More recently, Chelsea became involved with the N Strand commission project – Balby 2014 - which is led by a professional theatre company. This is a paid role of 10 hours per week.

**“Balby 2014 came up at the time when my youngest child was starting school and I would have been looking for work anyway....but would probably have ended up working in a supermarket.”**

Balby 2014 intends to build on Only Water Between and bring it up to date by considering what is happening in Balby now. There are plans to collect photos and local stories and then to provide a tour of Balby next summer.

**“Working with Carla [on Balby 2014] has opened up a different world... but it has been a steep learning curve.”**

Involvement with RUOS has had a positive impact on Chelsea's life, providing her with the opportunity to do something more creative and also providing her with a new focus and challenge which has helped her to move on with her life after losing her parents several years previously. Most significantly, her role has helped her to develop more confidence, particularly as a result of helping to run workshops and she is now planning to deliver her own workshops. She has been able to revisit and develop her creative skills, which has opened her eyes to different art forms. Outside of RUOS, Chelsea is also now training to be a teaching assistant at college.

CPP	Right Up Our Street
Lead organisation	Darts (Doncaster Community Arts)
Organisation type	Not for profit arts organisation
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cast</li> <li>• Doncaster Culture &amp; Leisure Trust (DCLT)</li> <li>• Doncaster Voluntary Arts Network (DVAN)</li> </ul>
Location	Doncaster, Yorkshire

CPP DONCASTER

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