

OPEN SESAME

UNLOCKING CREATIVITY IN EARLY YEARS

Evaluation Report by **Clare Halstead**



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INTRODUCTION

Open Sesame consisted of a series of three programmes of work that took place in East Sussex, West Sussex, Brighton and Hove and Surrey over six years. Each programme investigated the potential for collaboration between the early years sector, artists and the cultural sector and how that collaboration could support creative learning for under 5s.

There is a growing desire in the cultural sector to understand the needs of under 5s and their families, and Open Sesame has supported this by creating new work for children and families to participate in together, and by supporting staff in galleries, libraries and museums to develop ways of working with their very youngest visitors.

The importance of high quality creative experiences has been long understood in the early years sector, going back to the introduction of the Foundation Stage Curriculum in 2000 which made 'Creative Development' one of six key areas of learning, describing it as fundamental to successful learning and recommending that children have opportunities to work alongside artists and other creative adults.

This welcome requirement raised some questions about how this was to work in practice. What kinds of artists and creative adults might a nursery setting be able find, and to afford, and what experience might they have of working with under 5s?

Artists are explorers and experimenters – skilled in their artform and experts in playing with ideas and finding opportunity in accidental outcomes. These creative skills are mirrored in early years practice by the concepts of 'sustained shared thinking' and 'possibility thinking' that have been described by Anna Craft¹ and others.

Working creatively with under 5s can provoke anxiety amongst early years practitioners who do not consider themselves to be creative. But equally the idea of working with under 5s – and more specifically with 0–2s as in the most recent Open Sesame project – is a big challenge for artists and for people working in the cultural sector who don't work day-to-day with that age group.

By bringing artists, people working in the cultural sector and early years practitioners together into unique opportunities to learn with and from each other, Open Sesame has not just been about developing artists practice for working in early years settings, but has also been about giving early years practitioners more confidence in their own creativity, enabling them to bring that into their day-to-day work with children and colleagues.

At the heart of Open Sesame is Octopus Inc², a group of artists committed to exploring and expanding the possibilities of materials, processes, music and movement, and taking a playful and child-led perspective to inform the creative practice that has been shared through Open Sesame.

Open Sesame was developed and managed by Culture Shift³, and Arts Council England provided funding for all three phases of the programme, as did early years and arts services in West Sussex, East Sussex and Surrey. Individual early years settings put their resources into the programmes, as did galleries, libraries, museums and theatres across Sussex and Surrey. University partners worked closely with us, with University of Brighton developing and delivering the Level 4 module for Open Sesame 2 and 3, and researchers from Plymouth University investigating ways in which artists provide a model for the attributes needed for working with 0–2s.

Open Sesame is an exemplar of the potential depth and value of partnership between the early years and cultural sectors, and the power of the sustained belief that creativity has a valuable place in early years learning despite the constant waxing and waning of publicly funded services and structures.

This report looks in detail at how the Open Sesame programme developed; how it achieved lasting impact; and how real change was brought about by building skills, confidence and collaborative relationships over a sustained period of time. It also provides some thinking about the future direction of this area of work.

1. for example: Craft, A. (2003) 'Creative thinking in the early years of education', *Early Years*, 23(2): 143–54.

2. <http://www.octopusinc.org.uk>

3. <http://www.cultureshift.org.uk>

OPEN SESAME 2010–16

Key findings

The Open Sesame approach produced transformational effects on individuals and organisations that took part, with the following areas of activity being particularly successful:

- training staff and volunteers from nurseries, children's centres and cultural organisations in creative practice that is used in day-to-day activities with under 5s
- accrediting the learning of 31 people in the project through a Level 4 module designed and delivered in partnership with University of Brighton
- being the catalyst for new partnerships between local authority services in Surrey that have increased opportunities for creative training in the early years and arts sectors
- building new partnerships in East Sussex between early years and cultural sector organisations
- developing the expertise of the core team of lead artists and providing introductory training for artists new to working with under 5s
- creating three new participatory experiences that engaged parents and children and equipped them with ideas for creative play at home
- supporting the development of new participatory programming in cultural organisations

In longer term follow up with artists and early years practitioners from the first two projects, 90% of respondents said they would recommend the Open Sesame approach.

An overview of the three projects

See tables on subsequent pages...

		Aspects of the work	Key impacts	Implications for practice
Open Sesame 1: 2010–11				
Approach	Focus	Exploring how skills-sharing between artists and early years practitioners can have a positive impact on children's creative development and the early years setting.	Artists and EY practitioners agreed the project was a brilliant opportunity for gaining confidence in working creatively with very young children and sharing practice.	Confidence-building was the key factor affecting early years practitioners' ability to engage with and promote creative opportunities for children in settings. Working with artists created the potential for 'having a go'.
Context	Funding and partnerships	Funded through Creative Partnerships using an enquiry-led approach, with support from West Sussex County Council's Early Childhood Service and Arts Service and cultural partners.	Partnerships enabled effective cross-professional working and created opportunities for early years practitioners, settings and wider family and community to make contact with the creative and cultural sector.	Strong relationships between early years and cultural partners were built during this project and continued into the next two Open Sesame projects.
	Location and timescale	Across West Sussex over eight months alternating between 'masterclasses' and artists and early years practitioners working together in nursery settings. At the end of the project there were 'endings' which were either events to share the project with parents or training sessions for staff.	Travel was a challenge, as was committing time away from settings. Some projects involved parents and carers by promoting creative use of simple materials/ideas at home.	Local hubs to support creative work in early years settings could improve access in the future: travel costs for artists can be prohibitive for sessional work.
People	Artists, early years settings and partners	8 artists and 8 early years practitioners from nursery settings in West Sussex were paired up for the project.	Artists going into the settings, on-going relationships and the creation of a community of learning that supported experiential learning: a 'playful pedagogy'.	Practitioners would benefit from reflection on experiential learning through structured sessions at a University or college outside the masterclass sessions to make clearer links with day-to-day practice in settings.
		Masterclasses were led by theatre practitioners who make work for very young audiences, hosted by Chichester Festival Theatre and The Hawth Theatre and convened by Patrick Lynch from Lyngo Theatre.	Masterclasses provided collaborative space for participants and gave insight into creative practice, and providing opportunities for participants to understand each other's perspectives, reflect on the project and learn and be creative together.	Early years practitioners needed more support to engage with their creativity, some found the level of challenge at masterclasses outside their comfort zone.

		Aspects of the work	Key impacts	Implications for practice
Open Sesame 2: 2012–13				
Approach	Focus	Developing the idea of collaboration between artists, the cultural sector and early years settings, and introducing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a new accredited creative training route for early years practitioners • professional development opportunity for early career artists • a participatory creative event for young audiences and their families. 	EY practitioners' learning supported through Level 4 module designed and delivered by University of Brighton. Early career artists accredited learning through Gold Arts Award. 16 performances of the creative event, <i>Sorted?</i> – 500+ children, parents, carers and staff participating. Audience feedback overwhelmingly positive.	EY settings increased confidence in letting children lead and improved creative skills and confidence through working with artists. Trainees improved confidence in working with under 5s and benefitted from the skills and knowledge of EY practitioners. As a result of <i>Sorted?</i> parents felt inspired to explore creative play with their children.
Context	Funding and partnerships	West Sussex County Council Childhood Service bid to Arts Council England on behalf of an expanded partnership that now included early years and arts services in Surrey and East Sussex, artist and cultural partners and the University of Brighton.	Open Sesame provided impetus for Creative Shoots, a joint venture between Arts Partnership Surrey and Surrey's Early Years and Children's Service, supporting effective learning by embedding creativity in nursery settings.	Involvement of key stakeholders in each county proved valuable for cross-authority networking. Positive relationships developed between partners, especially in Surrey, leading to the establishment of a further project employing locally based artists and a 'hub' model.
	Location and timescale	October 2012 – September 2013. 13 settings across West Sussex, East Sussex and Surrey took part, with early years partners targetting the project primarily at disadvantaged areas. Group sessions took place in Brighton, Chichester and Horsham.	Travel again a challenge, especially over long distances in rural areas during a snowy winter to attend creative practice sessions and the university course.	Local hubs using high quality local artists and cultural organisations could overcome the travel issue.
People	Artists, early years settings and partners	A mixture of managers and practitioners took the lead in each early years setting and were each partnered with a trainee artist and supported by a lead artist.	Reflective practice supported by the university course and Gold Arts Award. Participants reflected in project sessions, keeping journals and recording planning and outcomes.	The balance of support, challenge and reflection led to shifts in thinking and changed or expanded practice. Greatest impacts were where settings cascaded the learning to their staff team and where managers led a change to the ethos of their settings.
		Artists from previous project formed 'Octopus Inc' and became the lead artists, acting as mentors for 7 trainee artists, leading 'creative practice' sessions and devising and presenting the creative event.	On-going relationships between lead artists, trainees, project managers and tutors provided a range of options for support.	Trainee and lead artists developed artform skills and confidence working with under 5s. Lead artist team continue to use their skills as creative trainers and facilitators running sessions with organisations across the region.

		Aspects of the work	Key impacts	Implications for practice
Open Sesame 3: 2014–16				
Approach	Focus	Focus on 0–2s and developing practice in the cultural sector. Creative programme of professional development for cultural organisations, early years practitioners, and families.	Partnerships between Children's Centres and cultural organisations led to changes in practice and new opportunities for participation. Training sessions with libraries and museums disseminated practice to a wider audience.	Opportunities for parents and children to participate were central with the focus on 0–2s and parents rather than daycare settings.
Context	Funding and partnerships	East Sussex County Council Children's Services worked in partnership with cultural organisations with funding from Arts Council England. University of Brighton led the Level 4 module. New partnership with Plymouth University also established.	Major re-structure of Children's Centres in Y2 had significant impact on partnerships.	Despite incorporating learning from previous years, it was hard to fully mitigate the impact of the changes to the Early Years service.
	Location and timescale	East Sussex, starting in early 2014 and ending in November 2016. Training sessions for libraries and museums took place across Sussex and also in the South-West.	Children's Centres in areas of deprivation in East Sussex chosen to partner with cultural organisations. To mitigate the issues with travel, the university module was delivered in Hastings.	The smaller county area meant that creative practice sessions could take place in cultural venues, adding another dimension to the project.
People	Artists, early years settings and partners	2 cohorts of staff, artists and volunteers took part, following the programme of creative practice sessions and the Level 4 module.	Work brought about changes to the practice of even highly experienced EY practitioners. Cultural partners were less experienced with very young children but gained confidence, developing new participation offers for families.	Partnerships continued to thrive, but reductions in staffing at Children's Centres threatens sustainability. Programming for under 5s in cultural organisations continues in some places.
		Octopus Inc delivered participatory performance for 0–2s, continuing their role as lead artists and mentors and leading creative practice sessions.	A new piece of work, <i>Inside, Outside, Upside Down</i> , was developed through the project and used in training sessions with museums and libraries.	The varied role of lead artists as trainers, mentors, facilitators and creative practitioners has enabled the dissemination of the project work in a variety of contexts.

OPEN SESAME 2014-16



Photo: Giovanni Estrella

This section is an in-depth evaluation of the most recent Open Sesame project including illustrative case studies from Year 1, description of project activity and in-depth analysis of outcomes.

The final section looks at some of the current constraints and opportunities for the future of this work.

Aims of Open Sesame 2014–16

Building on the previous projects, the proposal for this phase of Open Sesame focused on work with Children's Centres and cultural organisations in East Sussex with the following aims:

- to create new participatory work for under 5s in museums
- to take existing participatory work to wider audiences

- to offer learning opportunities to staff from museums, arts organisations, children's centres and libraries that will give them creative skills, confidence and knowledge about working with under 5s leading to significant changes in their practice
- to offer parents with children aged 0–2 opportunities to experience arts and cultural activities and accredit their learning through Arts Award
- to share learning from the project with a wide audience to achieve a significant change in thinking about working creatively with under 5s
- to conduct skills audits of the professional participants to gauge the impact that their learning during the project has had on the way they plan and resource activities for under 5s.

Quality criteria

Alongside the aims of the project, we have used what we have learned from previous projects to set the following quality criteria and use them throughout this section of the report to highlight evidence that the project has not just met its aims, but that it has met them to a high standard.

- evidence of successful partnership and sustained delivery of the work beyond the end of the project
- evidence of positive impact on parents and children
- examples of positive feedback from participants
- repeat or new bookings for artists

SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES

Open Sesame supported the development of sustainable programming for 0–2 year olds at 3 major galleries and museums in Sussex and established new partnerships between the early years and cultural sectors.

Despite significant challenges in the second year of the project, there was participation by 5 East Sussex Children's Centres in each year, and by 8 cultural organisations across the two years.

21 people had their learning in the project accredited by University of Brighton at Level 4. Skills audits of participants in Year 1 show clear gains in confidence in working creatively with very young children and individual feedback shows significant changes in practice as a result of the project.

The depth of learning, changes in practice, new partnership and new provision for 0–2s that have been achieved are directly related to the length of time given to the development of collaborative partnerships through the project.

Additional training opportunities were delivered in Brighton and Hove, West Sussex and Somerset for over 30 cultural organisations and there is evidence of more interest from similar organisations in accessing training for working with 0–2s.

Octopus Inc – the lead artists – created a new participatory performance for 0–2 year olds and feedback from families on their experiences in the project has been excellent and has encouraged families to visit museums and galleries for the first time.

Octopus Inc has had new commissions as a direct result of the project and has been shortlisted for funding through the Big Lottery People's Project for 2017.

Partnership support was strong throughout the project, including the final conference where there was inter-disciplinary dialogue about shared areas of concern, showing the degree of collaboration and trust that had been built through the project.

Case studies from Open Sesame will feature in a new publication about 0–2s to be published by Routledge in 2017 through partnership with researchers at Plymouth University.

Open Sesame has been effective in overcoming the emotional and attitudinal barriers to participation for first time gallery and museum visitors.

Open Sesame provides tried and tested ways of working that could support future integrated working between children and family services in education, childcare and health and the cultural sector.

CASE STUDIES – YEAR 1



A Winter's Trail, Octopus Inc, January 2014

Five Children's Centres in areas of deprivation and six cultural organisations took part and were partnered with each other and with an artist from Octopus Inc:

Cultural Partner	Children's Centre	Artist
Glyndebourne	Hailsham East Children's Centre	Jenny Staff
Hastings Museum and Art Gallery	St Leonard's Children's Centre	Jenny Staff
Jerwood Gallery	East Hastings Children's Centre	Alex Sutton-Vane
Towner Gallery	Devonshire Children's Centre (Eastbourne)	Anne Colvin
De La Warr Pavilion and Bexhill Museum	Sidley Children's Centre (Bexhill)	Vicky Cave

Most of the Children's Centres put forward two members of staff, while all the cultural partners put forward one member of staff or an artist contracted to them for the project, and in one case a volunteer took part.

All fifteen participants were enrolled as part-time students at University of Brighton for the Level 4 course 'Nurturing Possibility and Creativity in the Early Years'.

As an introduction to the project, participants were given the opportunity to experience the work of the lead artists by attending a performance of *A Winter's Trail* (a winter-themed version of *Brave Steps*) at the Dome, Brighton before the Open Sesame programme began.

QUALITY

Repeat or new bookings for artists

A Winter's Trail in 2014 sold out a 4-day run, comprising a total of 12 performances, with approximately 25 parents and children attending each show. The show was booked again by the venue for winter 2016.

http://brightondome.org/event/10368/a_winters_trail/

The programme for participants ran over six months and alternated between attending 'creative practice' sessions led by Octopus Inc, which were held at the cultural partner venues, sessions at University of Brighton for the Level 4 course, and sessions working together with each other and their lead artist at their venue.

The programme thus provided a wide range of opportunities for interaction and learning, time for relationships to build, and for skills to develop.

The following case studies give an in-depth insight into the project activity in three of the partnerships.

Hastings Museum and Art Gallery and St Leonard's Children's Centre

The Museum and Art Gallery was established over 125 years ago and offers free entry for local people and visitors to the town to explore its collection of art, culture and history from around the world.

The Museum and the Children's Centre are less than a mile apart and both are located in an area which is amongst the 10% most deprived in the country.

Before Open Sesame: What each venue was doing before the project

The Children's Centre ran drop-in sessions for 0–2s and activities for 0–5s at the Centre and other local community venues with a variety of activities for babies and families and trained staff who could offer holistic support and advice.

Hastings Museum and Art Gallery already had a strong family programme and ran free weekly *Book Bugs* sessions offering play activities in partnership with the Children's Centre. One group had been set up in 2004 to target families

with English as an additional language (EAL), the other group joined Open Sesame.

What happened during the Open Sesame project?

All the project sessions took place at the Museum. With the support of the early years practitioners, lead artist Jenny Staff gradually replaced the resources that the group usually used by bringing different materials into the Museum to create a series of 'provocations' that changed the environment and offered different opportunities for exploration and sensory stimulation. For example, using cardboard boxes in different sizes with various openings or hiding books and musical instruments by wrapping them in different textured fabrics – supporting children's schemas such as enveloping and transporting.

For the early years practitioners the project gave a practical context in which to apply theory from the university module such as Froebel's ideas about using simplified forms – cubes, spheres, cylinders – which are all easily accessible and found at home.

The group's activities had been centred on using books and stories, but Jenny changed this focus by encouraging the parents to explore the Museum collections, choosing materials that complemented their finds, and re-thinking the use of a restricted spaces by creating temporary 'zones' and making better use of furniture and objects that were already there.

The project allowed the group to set up zones of activity around the entire floor where the group was based, and thus encouraged parents to follow their mobile children around the space – it had been ambiguous before as to how the whole space was to be used. The artist created areas of activity which related to the different exhibits in that zone – experimenting to see what worked – and this gave clear direction and permission for children to explore and move and for parents to follow and feel comfortable.

What difference did the project make to participation?

Concern from practitioners that families from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds had not attended this group in significant numbers led to the creation of portable resources that the early years practitioners could take to community groups for those children to explore, and to act as a talking point where the practitioner could promote the *Book Bugs* sessions. Although this didn't make any significant difference to the numbers who attended *Book Bugs*, these boxes were also available to families visiting the Museum when the group was not running. In this way, the boxes also worked as independent learning stations for the Museum. The boxes themselves were designed as sensory objects of a height and structure that could be used by very small children to pull themselves up and investigate standing.

As a result of the project the small carpeted space that had been used was opened up for participation both by groups and visitors through exploring the potential of all the spaces, for example by putting lights into a darker space, creating hanging pieces on available hooks, and using sound in an open acoustic space, reframing the Museum as an exciting place to explore rather than a difficult space in which to run a group.

Through the change of focus brought about by the Open Sesame sessions, participation levels increased and a decision was made to change the name of the group to *Museum Explorers*, to more accurately reflect the emphasis on exploration and the age of the children attending, and to encourage parents into the Museum who may have found the *Book Bugs* name intimidating.

What is the feedback from families, and what was the biggest success and biggest challenge?

Exploring how the children used new resources also encouraged the parents to play, so by supporting them to use more open-ended resources they engaged more with their children in the process of play. This led to conversations about heuristic play and lots of parents collecting their own resources to continue to play at home. Conversations about the importance of play, communication and feelings around play also provided a starting point for talking to new parents about their experience of post natal depression.

Early years practitioners' expertise and knowledge enabled quite significant change to the group to take place without negative effects on participation. New theoretical knowledge was put into practice by early years practitioners and explored in a supportive environment, giving them a chance to move away from old favourites and have fun themselves.

The Museum could see the benefits to all the practitioners involved and aimed to introduce elements from the project into other activities. Staff capacity was a challenge however, limiting the ability for the Museum to be actively engaged with the project.

How is this work funded and sustained? What does the future look like?

A restructure of Children's Centres from April 2016 meant the cessation of support for both of the pre-school groups at the Museum. The Museum continued to run the free Thursday group in partnership with a local Community Interest Company who are leading the Museum Explorers sessions and adapting delivery to bring in some of the approaches and activities developed through Open Sesame. Each session will take a theme from the Museum collection and offer stories and activities to link to it encouraging parents in this group to go out and about interacting with objects in a way that they didn't before. However, to sustain any pre-school activity in the longer term will require

external funding. The Museum is looking into this, but other priorities and current staffing issues mean that success is doubtful.

“This is a big disappointment to the Museum and the families, as I feel that offering general groups provides a supportive way for targeted families to integrate with other activities and public programmes, developing confidence and providing opportunities for them without labels.”

(Education Officer and Keeper of World Art)

The longer-term impact of the work done through the Open Sesame project has thereby been curtailed by the double impact of re-structuring services and the knock-on effect on the established partnership between the Museum and the Children’s Centre that had sustained participation by families with very young children for many years.

QUALITY

Evidence of positive impact on parents and children

“I have bought some fabric with sequins as a consequence of last week’s session. J is fascinated by it and becomes very vocal when he looks at it – he reaches and grabs it and pulls it to his face.” (Parent)

A’s (15mths) mum said she ***“has discovered that he is fascinated by opening and shutting things and how things work.”*** (EYP observation)

Positive feedback from participants

An early years practitioner commented, ***“the project seemed to breathe fresh air into the session.”***

Towner Gallery and Devonshire Children’s Centre, Eastbourne

The Devonshire Children’s Centre is located in the centre of Eastbourne, parts of which are in the 10% most deprived wards in England. The Towner Gallery lies within 15-30 mins walk of the Devonshire ward and holds a collection of art by local, national and international artists as well as a year-round exhibition programme of contemporary and historical art, including work by local artists and schools.

Before Open Sesame: What each venue was doing before the project

The Children’s Centre regularly ran free drop-in sessions including *Baby Club* and *Baby Music Time* that offered a variety of singing and sensory activities for babies and families and were led by trained staff who could offer

support and advice. There was also a range of activities for children up to 5 years old.

Towner had started to develop its work with under 5s with monthly *Tiny Towner* sessions run in partnership with Eastbourne Library and charged at £3 per child. Before the start of the Open Sesame project the gallery had also commissioned artist Jane Gordon to make ‘Explorer Jackets’ that children aged 2–5 could use when visiting the gallery.

What happened during the Open Sesame project?

The partnership between the gallery and the Children’s Centre was supported by lead artist Anne Colvin who specializes in dance and movement.

Weekly drop-in sessions at both the gallery and the Children’s Centre were the focus for development. The two early years practitioners and the member of staff and volunteer from the gallery decided to split the twelve project sessions between both venues, and through a process of experimentation and reflection, learned from their experiences.

Through working with their lead artist the four participants developed a high level of trust, and gained insight into each others’ professional fields. They took time to observe and reflect in the sessions, including recording what they were seeing in real time, and used their notes to facilitate later reflection and to adapt their approaches accordingly.

Being introduced to new materials and approaches led to new activities – for example using music, movement and fabrics. By the end of the year, the small space used for the drop-in at the gallery had been completely re-thought, for example, everyone was asked to take their shoes off before coming in and encouraged to be on the floor, making a safer and more child-centred environment.

The sessions at the Children’s Centre also changed noticeably, with parents being much more involved in sensory play, rather than sitting back from activity.

What difference did the project make to participation?

Towards the end of the first year’s project, the gallery staff had built relationships with the families at the Children’s Centre who began to make visits to the gallery, most for the first time. As well as these families, numbers taking part in the drop-in were increasing leading to consideration of other changes at the gallery (such as making space for buggies and introducing more high chairs and options for children in the café.)

The bookable *Tiny Towner* sessions for 2–5 year olds had been popular from the start and continued to be fully booked throughout the project, with some spaces allocated to targeted families through the partnership with the Library and the Children’s Centre.

What is the feedback from families, and what was the biggest success and biggest challenge?

At the start of the project, families at Devonshire Children's Centre were not keen on the changes to their session, still wanting to sit on a duvet and talk to other parents, one complaining that she had more toys in her front room than were out at the *Baby Club*. As time went on, families became more engaged with the resources and the environment. Watching staff role modelling, parents interacted more with their child at their child's level, following their lead and letting them explore.

Building relationships with the families at the Children's Centre took time, but when they made their visit to the gallery, the impact was significant.

The relationship between the gallery and the Children's Centre was both a success and a challenge for the project. Having time to develop deep relationships enabled staff at both venues to experiment and challenge each other, extending their practice. The length of the project also meant that gallery staff could build their relationships with the families at the Children's Centre and this led to people visiting for the first time. However, time was also a challenge – the project demanded a lot of commitment over a long period, including the time for study to complete the level 4 course.

How is this work funded and sustained?

What does the future look like?

Changes to Children's Centres services in East Sussex have shifted priorities from universal provision to targeted interventions through the Healthy Child Programme.

Due to these changes, Children's Centres are not currently in a position to continue the work developed through the Open Sesame project, although there is always a need for the sharing and embedding of creative practice and Children's Centre venues will be available to volunteers to run universal groups for families with 0–5s and other community partners.

At Towner the training for staff and volunteers and establishing a working relationship with the staff at the Children's Centre supported the growth of *Tiny Towner* and contributed to its on-going sustainability because an in-house team could deliver the *Tiny Towner* sessions.

The gallery has maintained provision for early years participation and continues to explore how to connect it to the exhibition programme and provide progression within sessions and within the learning programme as a whole. Partnership with the early years sector and other local organisations will continue to be a vital part of this process and will continue to evolve and change in an ever-shifting landscape.

QUALITY

Evidence of successful partnership and sustained delivery of the work beyond the end of the project

The expertise established in the learning team encouraged the gallery to run a 'Tiny Towner Takeover Day' in the October following the first year of the project as part of the annual 'Take-Over Day' initiative led by Kids in Museums. The response to this exceeded all expectations, with parents and children queuing down the street.

Jerwood Gallery and East Hastings Children's Centre

Jerwood Gallery opened in Hastings in 2012. As an independent, not-for-profit organisation, every penny made goes back into the running of the gallery, which charges an admission fee and offers concessionary rates for local residents. The gallery is supported through a grant from the Jerwood Foundation, but receives no public subsidy for its core costs.

Less than a mile away, East Hastings Children's Centre is located in an area that is amongst the 10% most deprived in the country, though the gallery lies outside this area.

Before Open Sesame: What each venue was doing before the project

The Children's Centre ran drop-in sessions for 0–2s and a wider range of activities for 0–5s at their centre and at a range of other local community venues and schools, including some music, craft and sensory sessions aimed at specific needs in the community. The drop-ins offered a variety of activities for babies and families to engage with, as well as trained staff who could offer holistic support and advice to families.

The Jerwood Gallery didn't run any activities on a regular basis aimed at 0–2s, but did run some one-off pre-school events and workshops for children aged 4 and above.

There had been some initial meetings between the Children's Centre and the Jerwood Gallery a year or so before the project to look at how they could work together. The gallery had managed to get some funding for a couple of events that were supported by the Children's Centre, but the funding ran out.

What happened during the Open Sesame project?

Lead artist Alex Sutton-Vane initially assumed that a new award-winning contemporary gallery exhibiting some

extremely valuable artworks would be less than enthusiastic about opening its doors to under 2s.

Working closely with the group and staff at the Children's Centre Alex planned six themed sensory sessions – sound, smell, texture and touch, light and shade, jiggle and wiggle. These all took place at the Children's Centre, providing a 'test-bed' that built confidence in the gallery's Education Co-ordinator, and provided opportunities to elicit feedback from parents. Alex used both visual and sound 'provocations' for his sessions which including singing, and combined sounds with textures including jelly, cornflour, feathers and textured playdough, and smells such as citrus and herbs.

Parents were amazed at the response from the children, particularly to singing and sound, and regularly took home ideas to try. Through this process and the close collaboration between artist, early years practitioner and gallery staff, a plan was devised to transfer these activities to Jerwood Gallery.

Two sessions were planned for the gallery – one messy and one non-messy – using the dedicated learning space but also giving children, parents and carers freedom to explore. When looked at in detail, there were only a couple of artworks that needed specific protection, and some of the restrictions in the building also provided opportunities – for example a low-light gallery was ideal for a light and shade session.

During the sessions at the gallery, the main activity was set up in the learning space, but parents and children were also free to wander, with activities at set times to join in with in the learning space, or in gallery spaces. Parents enjoyed the opportunity to explore the gallery, sometimes sitting in front of a picture for a long time, and the children enjoyed exploring the building – crawling up the stairs and looking out of the huge picture windows was interesting and an activity in itself.

Volunteers would call people in to the set activities from where they were around the gallery, or they could stay in the learning space and carry on playing. For one session the learning space was full of sensory stuff, and for the messy session the learning space was covered in paper – floors and walls – ready for using paint, shaving foam, bubbles, mashed potato in the space and leaving shoes and 'clean' clothes at entrance and setting up a 'cleaning zone' on exit.

What difference did the project make to participation?

Participation in the Open Sesame sessions varied from 6 to 13 families; this has since built to around 30 participants at regular sessions.

The project provided an opportunity to develop a new strand of the gallery's learning and engagement programme and to develop and test it with support. The gallery started

by running one and a half hour sessions but now condense this into an hour and invite parents to stay as long as they like after the sessions have ended. The sessions have brought in new visitors who had not visited the gallery before.

What is the feedback from families, and what was the biggest success and biggest challenge?

From the gallery's point of view, marketing was the biggest challenge to start out with but once the word got out they built a supportive following. Open Sesame gave the gallery the contacts whilst also giving staff the confidence and support to try something new, and overall this has been a huge success.

The expertise of the early years practitioner, the willingness of the gallery to try something new and the creative input and support of the artist were fundamental to the success of the project, and were also supported by a fantastic team of gallery volunteers and resources from the Children's Centre. Having a structured plan for the initial sessions at the Children's Centre served to focus minds on the resources needed, and provided opportunities to share and generate ideas.

How is this work funded and sustained? What does the future look like?

In the year following the Open Sesame project, the Education Co-ordinator felt inspired to continue the good work. The Children's Centre supported her to design a 'heuristic'⁴ play area' in the stairwell space at the gallery which is a space that is available all of the time. The gallery was also keen to support and promote breastfeeding and obtained some breastfeeding friendly signs through the Children's Centre.

Following this the Education Co-ordinator arranged a couple of one off *Baby Sense* sessions at the gallery, supported with an Early Years Practitioner. The gallery charged £3 per adult and allocated 10 free places for families referred by the Children's Centre, thus maintaining the opportunity for all kinds of families to share the provision whilst avoiding 'labelling'.

By January 2016 this arrangement had become a monthly *Baby Sense* session and the gallery asked the Children's Centre for an Early Years Practitioner to support as before. Due to the restructure of the service, they were unable to allocate a practitioner but realized that this made a great opportunity for a volunteer. The Children's Centre was able

4. The word 'heuristic', taken from the Greek word 'eurisko' meaning to search and discover, offers children a range of objects that stimulate their senses and provide an opportunity to explore the world.

to find two volunteers for the first session and while the gallery will continue to charge £3 per adult the Children's Centre will still be able to allocate some free spaces for families they identify.



Photos: Alex Sutton-Vane

QUALITY

Evidence of successful partnership and sustained delivery of the work beyond the end of the project

"We feel confident that Baby Sense will continue to be a permanent part of our events programme. We would love to gain funding for the future to be able to offer one off events on top of the regular sessions. We plan to continue to offer Baby Sense and tailor the sessions around exhibitions, local festivals and the changing seasons."

(Gallery Education Coordinator)

Evidence of positive impact on parents and children

Observations by early years practitioners during the sessions capture some of the impact on children:

"C (9mths) was captivated by the sounds made by the artist; he concentrated intently on him before another activity took his attention."

"S explored the balloon with rice inside, she maintained focus, putting it to her mouth and moving it from hand to hand, smiling throughout the experience."

"O (7 mths) was captivated by the feathers she intently watched her mum blowing the feather up into the air and responded with giggles and babbling."

"H was fascinated by the lid on his sensory shaker. He spent 5 mins experimenting with the lid using a pincer grip."

Examples of positive feedback from participants

Some feedback from parents:

"Amazing session. So many great ideas for little ones and a fantastic opportunity to meet other mums in Hastings whilst in a relaxing space."

"We loved sitting upstairs looking out the windows surrounded by art and things to explore. It has been an amazing experience."

"Being in the gallery with my daughter was fun, having time (which is rare) to look at the paintings whilst she enjoyed crawling in the space."

"More often, café open for tea!!!"

Progress at the end of Year 1

Significant progress had been made towards achieving the project's aims by the end of the first year, however the work had also highlighted some issues.

Aim: to create new participatory work for under 5s in museums

Octopus Inc artists used the experiences of developing work for 0–2s in Year 1 as research and development for a new participatory performance. However, progress was slow due to competing demands on artists' time in supporting on-going partnerships.

Aim: to take existing participatory work to wider audiences

This had been achieved through the performances of *A Winter's Trail* at the Dome, Brighton.

Plans to develop *Sorted?* for children with additional needs had begun with a series of development sessions at a local special school, but further development of this strand of the project was also delayed because of the demands of the main project.

Also at the time of writing the bid, it was anticipated that two Octopus Inc practitioners with expertise in this area

would lead on the work. However, by the time the project was under way, these artists had other commitments.

Aim: to offer learning opportunities to staff from museums, arts organisations, children's centres and libraries that will give them creative skills, confidence and knowledge about working with under 5s leading to significant changes in their practice

The case studies illustrate what was achieved in the project when strong relationships were developed.

In the other pairings, there had been less consistent progress due to staff availability and geographic barriers.

Octopus Inc led the artform-based learning in the project and in the process they fulfilled multiple roles as managers, mentors, and trainers. There was a lack of clarity at times about the boundaries between artists, project managers at Culture Shift, and workplace managers. There was also acknowledgement that more time and support needed to be given to the artists for these multi-faceted roles.

The project gave ample opportunities for the lead artists to develop their skills and experience as trainers and to hone the content and delivery of the creative practice sessions – this fed into the development of training opportunities for organisations not directly involved in the project.

A target of 18 training sessions for organisations not directly involved in the project had been included in the funding bid. By the end of Year 1, a third of this target had been met.

The final marks achieved by participants on the Level 4 course were higher than the average expected for similar courses, and for nearly half of the cohort this was their first qualification at Level 4.

However, the mix of experience within the group had been a cause for concern at times. Staff at cultural venues lacked the knowledge of child development and the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum that early years practitioners had, and this led to some repetition for the early years practitioners. To mitigate this, the course allowed for a large degree of personalization, so individual participants used their project experiences and reflective practice to tailor their portfolios to their own learning needs.

Aim: to offer parents with children aged 0–2 opportunities to experience arts and cultural activities and accredit their learning through Arts Award

The project was very successful at giving parents and children opportunities to experience new creative activities both at Children's Centres and at cultural venues. This included developing relationships with families over a period of time that led to them visiting the cultural partner venues for the first time.

The anticipated funding from the Skills Funding Agency that would have enabled Arts Award to be built into the programme was not available, and further bids for funding to cover this part of the programme were not successful. On reflection, this element of the programme may not have had sufficient appeal to parents and would have increased the workload on the artists and project manager to an excessive degree. As a result, it was not pursued further in Year 2.

Aim: to share learning from the project with a wide audience to achieve a significant change in thinking about working creatively with under 5s

Funding to support activities for a regional early years network had been offered at the time of writing the bid, but had subsequently been withdrawn. The commitment to engaging a regional and wider audience in the project was met in Year 1 through a 'mini-conference' at Towner that attracted 47 delegates and included a presentation from project partners at Plymouth University.

Aim: to conduct skills audits of the professional participants to gauge the impact that their learning during the project has had on the way they plan and resource activities for under 5s

Skills audits of Year 1 participants collecting quantitative information show clear gains in confidence in working creatively with 0–2s using a range of artforms (see appendix).

Qualitative discussions with participants during the programme reveal more detail about this process:

- At the first session participants reported feeling anxious and nervous, yet excited. People felt somewhat overwhelmed with the amount of information to take in and were concerned about failure. They looked forward to working with new people, yet there was concern whether logistically it would 'all work', and whether the timescales were manageable.
- When asked to think ahead to how they might feel during the project they anticipated perhaps feeling confused and frustrated. However, they also imagined that they would be starting to feel more confident and would be beginning to explore new ideas.
- They predicted that at the end of the project they would be proud at what they had achieved. They hoped they would be confidently delivering sessions with families and would feel more knowledgeable. There was a sense that they might feel exhausted, but have a sense of satisfaction.
- What was actually reported during the project was a lot of interesting and useful learning. Relationships were building, and trust was developing, with plenty of opportunities to try out new ideas. Participants

reported that the schedule felt busy, though 'light-bulb moments' were happening, with lots of communication taking place and interest growing.

- At the end participants did report a genuine sense of achievement. People were beginning to think about 'what next' and how to continue the relationships and partnerships that had evolved.
- Participants reported feeling happy that they had participated, and sad that the programme had come to an end. There was a feeling that participants felt inspired to continue to support creativity in parents and their babies, and were overall more confident in taking risks.

QUALITY

Examples of positive feedback from participants

"What has helped me is thinking more about the movement of a 0–2 year old. I've always done a lot of messy (play) with fabrics and textures, but not so much thinking about the movement and what they can see. So actually that is something that I've implemented and used in one of the groups; using movement with fabrics and materials, which is something I wouldn't have thought of before."

"I feel that I've developed a lot... any group I go to, and I go straight to the child. I don't pay attention to the parent any more. I go straight to the child, go to the floor and play with the child, and then I communicate with the parent. So I've changed my way of practice, let's say."

"I would say that the depth of my understanding has got better, definitely, because it's forced me to kind of look at those things again. And as a relatively new person working with children, it's definitely added. It's made me more passionate, actually, about how important those things are, you know, interactions with peers, and understanding about the developing brain, and why it is that what we're putting out, and what we're saying to parents is so important."

"It feels like we're all so on board and working as a team, that every week we go, right, what can we bring, it's getting sort of wilder and crazier and – hundreds of boxes and massive boxes become buses, and a bus became a house...!"

"...the parents are all engaging with the babies, and that's really, like sometimes you sit back and you go, wow, all the parents and babies are busy doing stuff, playing with bits of nothing, you know, and they're having a great time. So in that respect, you know, it's successful."

YEAR 2 – CASE STUDIES

At the start of Year 2 a significant re-organisation of Children's Services in East Sussex was announced. Staff at the Children's Centres faced potential redundancy or role changes from April 2016, so to enable those that did want to take part the dates for the University of Brighton course and for the creative practice sessions were compressed into a shorter timeframe between November and mid-May rather than extending to the end of June as in Year 1.

Despite these pressures, 5 Children's Centres applied to participate in the project.

Recruitment of cultural partners for Year 2 was a mixed picture. Towner took part for a second time with different participants, but other cultural venues struggled to commit staff and time, and the geographical location of some Children's Centres didn't match easily with an accessible cultural partner. Two of the pairings were therefore offered to Audio Active, a Brighton-based music organisation that works across a range of venues, and four pairings in total were established.

Cultural Partner	Children's Centre	Artist
Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft	Chailey Children's Centre	Anne Colvin
Audio Active	Wealden Children's Centres (Uckfield/ Crowborough)	Tom Cook
Audio Active	East Hastings Children's Centre	Alex Sutton-Vane
Towner Gallery	Devonshire Children's Centre (Eastbourne)	Jenny Staff

Ten participants from these pairings were registered for the Level 4 course with University of Brighton, plus one volunteer from Year 1 participant Bexhill Museum who had been unable to take the course previously.

The fifth Children's Centre – Hailsham – was offered a series of professional development sessions for staff that were led by Octopus Inc and included opportunities for parents and children to participate.

A celebratory event for Year 1 participants provided an opportunity to introduce Year 2 participants to the project, and a more thorough introductory day was also held before the start of the project sessions to give an overview, to introduce the lead artists and for participants to get to know each other.

QUALITY

Evidence of successful partnership and sustained delivery of the work beyond the end of the project

Partnership meetings throughout the two years of Open Sesame were well attended by partner organisations who worked with Culture Shift project managers through the changing circumstances from Year 1 to 2, and supported adaptations and improvements to the project.

The partnership with Plymouth University in Year 1 led to a joint presentation at the *Methodological Innovations* conference in December 2015 at Plymouth University, a joint application to the British Educational Research Association conference and to the inclusion of a chapter about the project in a Routledge publication about working with 0–2 year olds (publication expected 2017).

Towner and Devonshire Children's Centre

Taking part in the project for a second year gave the gallery an opportunity to develop its work with 0–2s and families further, and to work with another member of Octopus Inc.

The Children's Centre manager committed two staff to the project on the basis of the impact that had been felt from Year 1 on the individual practitioners and the whole team. The relationship between the gallery and the Children's Centre had continued "with targeted group (held at the Towner art gallery) for families at level 3 on the continuum of need." (CC Manager)

The focus for the year was to take the sessions into the gallery spaces – as had been done successfully at Jerwood in Year 1 – and to continue to develop practice at the Children's Centre drop-in sessions.

Lead artist Jenny Staff worked persistently to encourage families from the Children's Centre to visit sessions at the gallery, and this was achieved before the end of the project.

QUALITY

Evidence of positive impact on parents and children

Parent comments on Tiny Towner sessions:

"Thank you for such a fun morning! We really enjoyed visiting the gallery – a first for me. Staff were welcoming, friendly and very helpful. We really liked the different materials to explore. It was nice to feel comfortable in the gallery singing with my daughter. We would like to come (again) soon!"

"Really enjoyed quiet space to play and explore while other babies were downstairs! Time slot is good too as often we can't go to groups due to my schedule. Polite and engaging staff/volunteers! Play opportunities I had not thought of (rice in balloons and space blankets) which have given me lots of creative ideas for play with both my children at home. Thank you for a lovely morning!"

"I think using this as a group venue is an excellent idea. It's somewhere I wouldn't normally come, so it would encourage me to return regularly and support the Towner."

Audio Active and East Hastings Children's Centre

The Children's Centre was keen to continue to work with cultural partners and the Open Sesame project for three main reasons: the impact on practitioners of using reflective practice, the benefit of gaining a Level 4 qualification, and because of the early years knowledge and skills that they could offer to the partnership with a creative practitioner.

"It is... a great opportunity for practitioners to gain a Level 4 qualification and to reflect on practice in an area closely linked to everyday work, supporting us in making a real difference to families in our clusters." (CC Manager)

Despite the positive start, there were three changes to the early years staff taking part during the project, and none were participating by the end of March. Also the freelance musician put forward for the project by Audio Active found it hard to attend consistently due to other freelance work.

Audio Active and Wealden Children's Centres

This pairing also experienced issues with staff and freelance availability and some absence due to illness, and in addition the attendance by families at the regular group at the Children's Centre had deteriorated to very low numbers.

The high number of challenging factors in this particular setting brought this pairing to an end, and the music

practitioner from Audio Active was offered alternative ways of engaging with the project by visiting other partnerships. This supported her learning and she completed the Level 4 course.

Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft and Chailey Children's Centre

The Museum was already running provision for 2-5 year olds, but was keen to develop provision for younger children and to build stronger links with local families and with the Children's Centre. Initially Lewes Children's Centre applied to take this role, but this was later changed to Chailey.

This partnership unfortunately withdrew from the project after a few weeks. Questions were again raised about how the Level 4 course could cater for such a diverse cohort, and in this case it was felt that it was not sufficiently tailored to the needs and experience of these participants.

The Museum continued their involvement by hosting a creative practice session.

Hailsham Children's Centre

One of the most successful elements of Year 2 was the development of CPD activities for staff at Hailsham Children's Centre. These came about as a replacement offer due to the lack of an available cultural partner. Two 'messy play' sessions were run by Anne Colvin and Tom Cook. These were well attended and the feedback from these sessions was excellent.

SEN sessions and a new participatory performance

Re-thinking *Sorted?* as a participatory performance for children with additional needs had become a more complex area of work than anticipated, and the freelance practitioners within Octopus Inc with more specialized skill in this area were not, in the end, available to lead this work. Development time testing the show with SEN audiences in Brighton and Portsmouth highlighted the need to create a sophisticated 'package' of resources for before and after the visit.

Overall, the artists had found that the time allocated to them had predominantly been used to support the main programme, leaving less scope for creative development of new participatory work.

However, a new participatory performance *Inside, Outside, Upside Down* for 0-2s was developed, using the experience gained through the project sessions. This was trialled at

some of the training sessions run for other organisations during Year 2 and at the 'All to Play For' conference.

Training events

Training events for organisations not directly involved in the project took place in the south-east and in the south west.

The training took the form of two-day or one-day events led by Octopus Inc that began with a practical session for parents and children using the new participatory show *Inside, Outside, Upside Down*, with staff from the organisations observing the activity. The follow-up sessions gave staff opportunities to reflect on what they had seen and to explore the resources and techniques used:

- **2015:**
 - 2 days: hosted by Chichester Festival Theatre with other local organisations attending
 - 2 days: training at Brighton Libraries
- **2016:**
 - 2 days: training at Brighton Museum
 - 1 day: South West Museums group which has 35 member organisations held a day at Taunton Museum for 30 people.

Further advertising of these sessions via the GEM network brought enquiries from the Geffrye Museum, Surrey Heath Museum, Compton Verney, Doncaster Museum, Horniman Museum and Tiverton Museum. The cost of the training sessions was the main barrier to these taking place.

QUALITY

Evidence of positive impact on parents and children

Parents feedback – South West Museums training:

"Thank you. O enjoyed herself, especially the shredded paper and noisy balloons."

"Very enjoyable, thank you. Great tactile experience. Unfortunately my daughter loves to RUN and does not like sitting still for long enough to get the most out of the activities on offer. Really good for all though! (my daughter is 18 months old)."

"Love the shredded paper idea, the balloons and the tents with different tactile experiences."

"Thank you! We had a brilliant time! Our favourite bit was the shredded paper and the dark tent. E loved exploring the wooden drawers and finding pine cones!"

"Really interesting group, lots of different activities for the children to play with."

"Brilliant! Love messy play and interacting with other babies and children. Thank you."

"F enjoyed 'joining in'. Particularly watching the other children and the balloons. We would happily join a future session."

"L was rather wary to start. This isn't really her but there were lots of new faces and objects. As she warmed up it was lovely to see her face as things caught her eye. Her particular favourite was the noisy balloons! A lovely, lovely session."

"J really enjoyed the dark sensory items including the coconut shells and new items he's not seen before. He didn't like the shredded paper falling on his face, but he isn't used to things touching his face, so that's probably why. Good age range, 0-2 years, as it excludes older children which in the past tend to overtake younger babies."

All to Play For



Photo: Giovanni Estrella

In November 2016, participants from both years of the project were invited to a final sharing event at the Jerwood Gallery and Stade Hall in Hastings along with others with an interest in the work.

As well as sharing the work of the project and celebrating the achievement of the project participants who had completed the Level 4 course, All to Play For was an opportunity to look ahead at how to continue to support creativity for under 5s.

Attendees included participants from previous and current Open Sesame projects, project partners and people new to the project including researchers from Kings College London and staff from the Museum of London.

Presentations by Early Years services highlighted the successes of Open Sesame:

- creating new experiences for children and parents
- teamwork with the artists
- opening up new spaces in cultural venues to families who had never visited them before
- new skills for early years practitioners
- support for the cultural sector to understand the needs of 0–2s and the importance of process over end product
- improving confidence of early years practitioners in their own creativity

as well as some of the current challenges facing the early years sector:

- loss of universal provision at Children's Centres and consequent loss of experienced practitioners
- attention moving to other programmes
- the challenges of 30 hours provision⁵

However the challenges that these changes presented could also include some opportunities – for example, volunteers leading 'stay and play' provision can have good links to the local community and can act as a voice for local needs.

Using the Open Space⁶ format, a question was put to the participants to elicit further challenges and concerns, and to find ways forward:

'How can we work together to continue to provide high quality creative practice for young children and their families?'

Building on this question, small discussion groups were formed on the following topics:

- How can a visiting artist help an early years setting develop creative ways of working?
- More opportunities for music
- How do we advocate for creativity in Reception and beyond?
- What does 'meaningful' early years arts engagement look like?
- How can I work creatively on a home visit?
- Can language be taught through arts? Creating a common space for different cultures and a new perspective of the arts
- What's going on that I don't know about in the community?

5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-parents-benefit-from-30-hours-free-childcare-early>

6. For an explanation of this approach see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology

- How can we make the provision accessible, affordable and friendly?
- How will we ensure creativity within the 30 hour offer?
- How can we encourage health colleagues to understand creativity?
- How can practitioners bring out their own creativity if they don't feel confident doing it?
- How can we break down the barriers of parents not wanting their children to get messy when being creative?
- What creative play opportunities are there for parents/ volunteers – without children present?

The full notes from these sessions are in the Appendix, but some key themes and opportunities that were highlighted include:

- The potential for music in particular and the arts in general as an opportunity to overcome cultural and language barriers.
- The on-going need to build confidence in early years practitioners and parents in using creative approaches through skills-sharing, encouragement, experiential learning, and playfulness.
- The need to provide information to parents, early years staff, managers and other professionals about how creative learning is beneficial to children's development – including the value of play and process and emotional connection as well as links to the EYFS. This includes a need to demonstrate what 'quality practice' looks like.
- New thinking is needed about how to communicate with parents about what is on offer (including better use of digital and social media as well as word of mouth through community based volunteers), and about where activities are run – including more partnership working with libraries, community venues, cafes and taking ideas from other sectors – e.g <https://www.parkrun.org.uk>
- Restrictive schemes of work, incompatible assessment processes, and differences in professional training and priorities can all limit communication and shared understanding between professionals working with the same families and children across different phases of education and support.
- The 30 hour entitlement raises questions about the quality and balance of activities that will be offered to children spending significant hours each week in childcare settings. Limited funding for this provision could lead to lower qualified staff and a knock-on impact on the provision of open-ended creative resources for play and learning.

- Funding and sustainability are on-going issues. Pupil Premium funding and links to the new Early Excellence Hubs in East Sussex⁷ could provide opportunities for early years settings to work with artists if further evidence can be presented to managers about the effectiveness of artists working in early years.

QUALITY

Evidence of successful partnership and sustained delivery of the work beyond the end of the project

Of the 60 people attending *All to Play For*, 38 were from the early years sector and 22 from the cultural sector, 4 were from past projects and 32 were new to the work.

Positive feedback from participants

"The Open Space discussions were incredibly helpful and a good way to gain lots of information in a short time."

"I enjoyed all aspects!! By far the most interesting and intellectual yet FUN course/conference I have ever taken part in."

"Well done for raising awareness of the struggle creativity 'creates' around Early Years Practitioners."

"This highlighted some key issues within the setting, and thanks to the passion and input of others I will be adding these ideas to my practice."

"I enjoyed the activity in the gallery and shall go back to my nursery with more ideas. The Open Space was also beneficial in thinking how to improve confidence of other staff."

Repeat or new bookings for artists

Staff from the Museum of London attended the event and have since booked Octopus Inc to run participatory sessions.

Progress at the end of Year 2

Aim: to create new participatory work for under 5s in museums

By the end of Year 2 Octopus Inc had developed and trialed their new participatory performance for 0–2s *Inside, Outside, Upside Down* and this had had positive feedback from families and professionals who had seen and experienced it. However, lack of funding within the museums sector is a barrier to future presentations of this work.

7. <https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/virtualschoolbag/pages/ArticleView.aspx?article=5372&bag=513&sch=>

Aim: to take existing participatory work to wider audiences

As a direct result of the project, Octopus Inc had bookings from Museum of London for the *Sorted?* show from the previous Open Sesame project and had been shortlisted for funding from The People's Project for 2017 – a Big Lottery initiative where projects are put to a public vote⁸ – to take participatory sessions for 0–2s and training to families and venues in Brighton & Hove and the wider Sussex area.

Aim: to offer learning opportunities to staff from museums, arts organisations, children's centres and libraries that will give them creative skills, confidence and knowledge about working with under 5s leading to significant changes in their practice

The training sessions that took place have led to the development of sustainable activities for 0–2s at Brighton Museum, and have supported the introduction and sustained development of programming for 0–2s among project participants especially at Towner and Jerwood galleries⁹.

Feedback from the training sessions for the South West Museums group showed that the training had met a need for understanding how to work with this age group, but had also exposed some of the barriers to taking it further – lack of funding for staff and resources; entry charges making activities inaccessible to some families; putting across a process-led ethos to parents who often expect an end product; limitations of museum spaces and facilities. Organisations that had followed the full Open Sesame programme had found ways around these barriers through partnership with Children's Centres and the development and testing of their offer to families with support over a longer period.

Aim: to offer parents with children aged 0–2 opportunities to experience arts and cultural activities and accredit their learning through Arts Award

As noted at the end of Year 1, this aim was not fulfilled due to lack of anticipated funding.

Aim: to share learning from the project with a wide audience to achieve a significant change in thinking about working creatively with under 5s

The *All to Play For* conference event was very successful in both sharing the learning from the project and opening up discussion about the wider issues in providing creative

8. <https://www.thepeoplesprojects.org.uk>

9. see Appendix

learning opportunities for under 5s and their families. The event attracted people from a wider area and range of organisations than those represented in the project.

Aim: to conduct skills audits of the professional participants to gauge the impact that their learning during the project has had on the way they plan and resource activities for under 5s.

Skills audits were not collected in Year 2 due to the high number of changes to participants. However, feedback collected from training sessions, the pass rate for the Level 4 course and the presentations given by participants at the *All to Play For* event all testify to significant changes in practice – for example, an early years practitioner spoke about how the project helped her to re-focus on a child's experience, to remember to enjoy play herself, and how it had given her more insight into the potential of a wide range of materials for sensory play.

An artist practitioner in the project described how the different aspects of the project had helped her to learn in different ways: observing other practitioners had enabled her to learn how to plan for possibility and letting children lead, rather than planning for specific outcomes; the creative practice sessions had given her an opportunity to play and to think about a child's experience of play; the university course had given her insight into child development and the reflective context to assimilate her learning. All together, this had led to a significant shift in her thinking and practice.

QUALITY

Evidence of successful partnership and sustained delivery of the work beyond the end of the project

The project has supported Brighton Museum, Jerwood Gallery and Towner to establish sustainable regular programmed activities for 0–2s.

Positive feedback from participants

South West Museums training participants:

'I absolutely loved your sensory tents! I feel like I haven't done something like that in so long. It made me think about sensory play from a personal perspective, so I could understand it from a doing and enjoyment side rather than trying to think of complex things that could give children a definite learning outcome. I now appreciate simplicity much more. Thinking that they really don't have a framework of understanding, so need to experience things in a very simple way. Every experience is important, and I feel I could encourage and facilitate it now. Thank you.'

'Fantastic day, thanks very much! I enjoyed the opportunity to observe children and parents, and then play ourselves. Great to think about how to use objects to inspire children and us to use them as starting points. Nice group work thinking of an artefact activity. Could have had slightly longer in group discussions of 3 great and 3 tricky scenarios. Great work, really enjoyed it!'

OUTCOMES

What has been achieved

The Open Sesame approach does not fit easily into the prescribed requirements of outcomes-orientated training programmes; it is a divergent approach that demonstrates a replicable model of what can be achieved through collaborative partnerships that respond to specific contexts and that achieve change through sustained and supportive relationships. There are thus many different outcomes from the project, and some may not yet be apparent.

Although the project encouraged all participants to develop confidence in their own creativity, the intention was not that all participants would be able to take on the role of the artist by the end of the project. While everyone can be creative, not everyone is an artist, and this is a distinction that helps to illuminate the particular skills of professional artists.

Bringing leading galleries, museums and other cultural organisations into Open Sesame added a new dimension to the learning from previous projects, providing stimulation and support for new programme activity and opening up new spaces that are welcoming to parents and carers with babies and young children.

The transformations achieved by the Open Sesame project can be partly attributed to the quality of the relationships developed over time. Over a six- to nine-month period, the project participants had the opportunity to develop trust, both in the lead artists (who are supporting them to take risks and experiment) and in the partners with whom they are paired.

Understanding the professional environment of someone employed in a gallery or museum takes time, and equally it takes time for someone from a gallery or museum environment to understand the day-to-day practice in a Children's Centre and the skills of the practitioners they are working with. There are barriers to overcome, including the use of professional 'jargon' and terminology, and differences in assumptions made about the needs of children and families and the purpose of working creatively in different learning environments. There are different skills sets and knowledge, for example knowledge of art practices and historical artefacts, or of language and communication and child development.

At times, some early years practitioners felt that they were having to fill in a lot of early years knowledge that cultural participants did not have, as some had never worked with this age group before and didn't have knowledge of the

EYFS. However, having time to understand each other's skills and knowledge meant that the differences between participants increased the diversity of experience in the project overall, rather than acting as a barrier.

Through the six creative practice sessions spread out over each project year, and the on-going support from a lead artist assigned to each partnership, the participants developed trust in the creative process of the project. Lead artists encouraged participants to play, and through playing with materials to notice their own and others' sensory responses, and to interact playfully with each other. Giving this 'permission' to participants to have their own experience of play underpinned the learning in the project as it created a deeper understanding of children's experiences.

Reflection was built into this process so that experiences were discussed and recorded and their potential for use in sessions with children and families was explored. The enjoyment and playfulness of these sessions helped the participants to bond, and by involving them in process-led exploratory play, helped develop a confidence in this way of working which they could then model in sessions with children and families.

The creative practice sessions included more unfamiliar art-forms such as dance and sound, and in the skills audits from Year 1 all the participants reported increased confidence in using a range of artforms with 0–2s and their families.

The length of the project gave the participants time to develop and test their ideas. The iterative process moved the participants around the different contexts of Children's Centre groups, gallery and museum spaces, creative practice sessions and university sessions, allowing ideas to cross-fertilise gradually, and providing regular opportunities to test ideas in practical situations. Changes in practice were therefore based on experimentation and testing, including feedback from observations of children and conversations with parents and the introduction of new ways of working were achieved with the support of managers in both early years and cultural settings.

Time was also essential for forging relationships with families. Cultural partners visiting the sessions at Children's Centres were gradually able to establish positive relationships with children and their parents and carers, but it took some time for this to be strong enough to encourage them to visit for the first time.

The quality of the practitioners, including the lead artists, the early years practitioners, the staff from cultural partner

organisations and the university course leader also contributed to the success of the project. The lead artists had had the experience of the two previous projects to draw on, as well as being individually experienced in using their art practice in early years.

The university course added value to the learning process through linking participants' experiences with theories of child development and pedagogy. For some early years practitioners this meant re-visiting previous areas of study, but with the added context of a live project environment this was productive and encouraged them to push their practice further. For some of the cultural participants this was the first time they had engaged in this area of study and the module was an essential adjunct to their learning in the rest of the project, providing a theoretical base for the work as well as an introduction to reflective practice.

However, there were on-going issues with having a very mixed cohort in each year, and the disparity between the knowledge about child development and practice in early years settings held by early years practitioners on the one hand, and cultural participants on the other. There were also issues about the accessibility of information and resources for part-time students and between participants. A suggestion of a shared Facebook group was not workable due to restricted access for early years practitioners. Despite this, good results were achieved with scores above the average for similar modules.

As well as the staff and volunteers directly involved in the project, there must also be mention of the managers and wider teams of staff and volunteers who supported the project. The time that had to be committed to the project meant time away from other aspects of people's roles but in each partnership this time was found.

New initiatives or changes to ways of working also meant that there were impacts on others. For example, in galleries and museums unused to welcoming very young children there were questions to answer about the practicalities of the work and impact on other visitors. Mitigating these impacts is another positive feature of a project that develops progressively over a number of months, providing sufficient time to work through questions and challenges.

Feedback from participants helps to illuminate the impact on project participants from Children's Centres and cultural organisations, and also from parents. The project achieved significant changes in professional practice and was successful at creating positive experiences for adults and children who were visiting galleries or museums for the first time.

The ambition to include Arts Award to develop and accredit parent's experiences was not based on evidence of need and in future, projects would need better research into parents' needs and interests before committing to delivery of Arts Award in similar programmes.

Similarly, the intention to adapt an existing participatory experience for children with additional needs fell outside the scope of the project and would require more resources than envisaged.

The training sessions had a significant though necessarily more limited impact on a wide range of cultural organisations and this part of the project also enabled the lead artists to hone and adapt the creative practice sessions that they delivered in the main project into a compact and effective training package.

A wider perspective

In evaluating the Open Sesame project, we need to re-iterate why a project like this is important. At a 'micro' level, Open Sesame has been interrogating the potential value in closer relationships between artists, early years practitioners and staff at cultural venues and the positive impacts that this can have on children and families.

At a 'macro' level, we need to think about why this is of value in society.

A 2015 report by King's College London that looked at the development of arts policy towards children and young people recommended that "policy-makers place greater emphasis on encouraging arts activity amongst pre-school-aged children" (p. 24) and links this directly to family participation and the positive social and emotional benefits that lead to successful later engagement in society.¹⁰

The Kids in Museums 2016 report *Hurdles to Participation*¹¹ identified 6 barriers to participation by children, young people and families in museums and cultural institutions:

- practical
- social and attitudinal
- pressures on schools and curriculum
- limited consultation with young people
- poor collaboration between museums and community groups;
- project funding and funding cuts.

These barriers are significant because they contribute to inequality in society.

10. 'Step by Step: Arts Policy and Young People 1944–2014' <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/culturalenquiries/youngpeople/Step-by-step.pdf>

11. 'Hurdles to Participation' <https://www.keepandshare.com/doc/8181806/report-hurdles-to-participation-pdf?da=y>

The report authors cite concerns in the Warwick Commission¹² report that “the publicly funded arts, culture and heritage... are predominantly accessed by an unnecessarily narrow social, economic, ethnic and educated demographic that is not fully representative of the UK’s population.” Concluding that free entry has failed to ensure flagship museums become more inclusive, the figures are quoted as follows: “Higher social groups accounted for 87% of all museum visits, the lower social groups only 13%.”

Social and attitudinal barriers often rest with parents – and these can be grouped as ‘emotional’ and ‘interest’ barriers:

Emotional barriers can be: “fear of being judged; level of discomfort; fear of feeling out of place; fear of exposing emotions / showing themselves up; fear of being excluded; feeling of not being educated enough; lack of practical emotional support; pressured by other demands of parenthood; a perceived attitude of what staff will be like; attitude (or fear) of their own children; and overwhelming sense of chaos that doesn’t offer sufficient time.”

Interest barriers can be: “not knowing anything about what is available, how they could be involved; not understanding the relevance or purpose of what a child is doing; suspicion and mistrust; feeling they won’t be taken seriously; having had a bad experience in the past; not believing staff understand/care enough; bad memories.”

Open Sesame has been effective in overcoming these barriers, creating accessible and transformative experiences for parents and children visiting museums and galleries for the first time, and through investing in relationships between cultural partners and the early years sector, has created the conditions for sustainable collaboration.

However, Open Sesame has also experienced the limitations of the sixth barrier – project funding and funding cuts. Some of the issues that arose during the project – lack of clarity about roles, availability of freelance practitioners, delays to some aspects of the programme, compromised project delivery in year two – can all be attributed to the nature of short-term projects and to funding cuts.

Looking ahead

The current re-organisation of early years services is increasingly focused on working with the most needy families instead of supporting universal provision. As a result, the availability of staff to participate in future Open Sesame-type projects could be severely limited.

However, the re-organisation of services for early intervention also includes more thinking about integrated

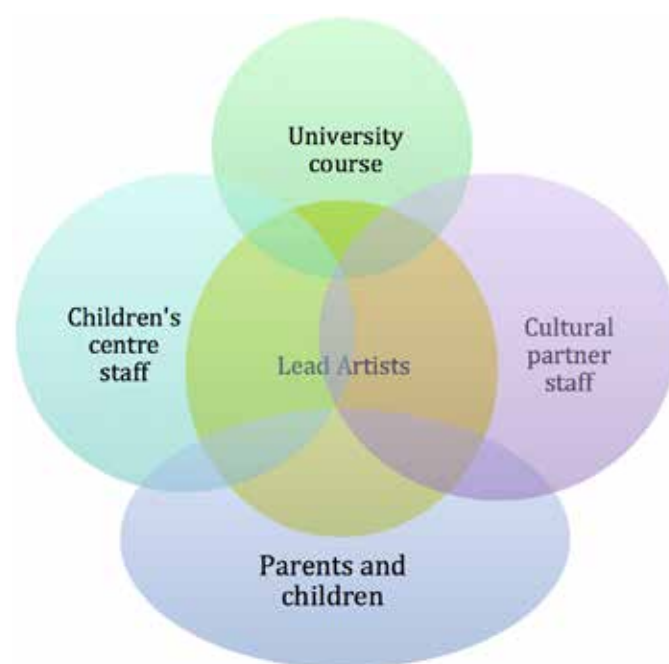
working across services and, if the arts and cultural sector were to be included in these developments, then partnership working could be enhanced in the future.

Within the arts and cultural sector there are initiatives around Cultural Commissioning and the establishment of a national network of Cultural Education Partnerships. Organisations receiving regular funding from Arts Council England are now required to report on their 0–5 provision.

The 2014–16 Open Sesame programme and its predecessors benefitted from significant partnership funding from early years service partners, as well as generous financial and in-kind support from a range of other partners in the cultural sector. By the end of the project, it was clear that this level of funding was no longer available.

Are there ways in which the learning model for this project could be adapted for future projects?

The Open Sesame model can be simplified in this diagram – the three-way partnership between artists, early years practitioners and cultural organisations is supported by the learning opportunities at each intersection:

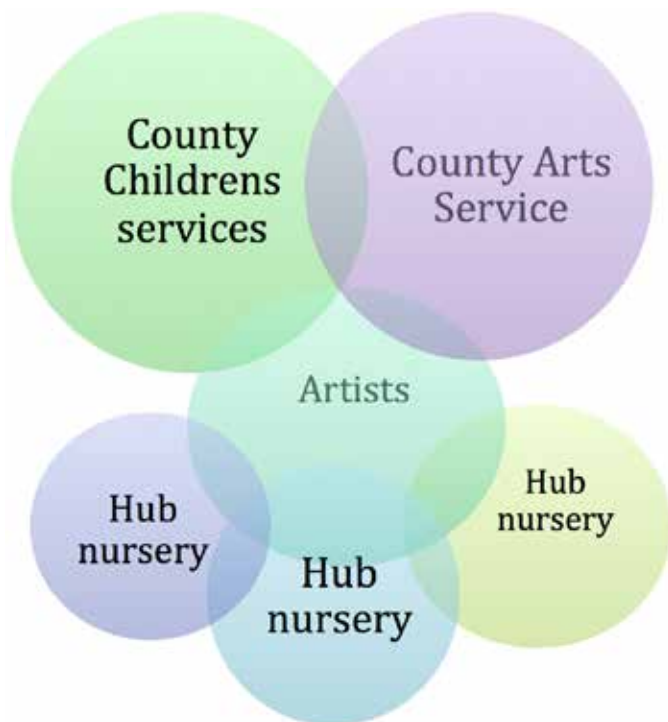


These are complex inter-relationships and there are examples of these working well in the Open Sesame programme. However, to achieve best results, all of these need to work together and this requires the support of funding and infrastructure.

In Surrey, Open Sesame 2 led to further project work using a different model¹³. This might provide a more sustainable alternative where the resources are available:

12. ‘Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth’ http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/warwick_commission_report_2015.pdf

13. For more information about Creative Shoots see <http://www.artspartnershipsurrey.org.uk/current-projects/creative-shoots/>



This model is led through partnership between the Arts and Early Years services at county council level. The hub nurseries work with artists and share practice with a local cluster of early years settings. The cluster nurseries visit and observe, and there is reflection time after these sessions with artists. Joint training for all cluster settings and artists is provided at the start and this is built on through advisory visits by children's services staff so that the work can be linked to the 'characteristics of effective learning' in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There are also artist-led and hub-led twilight sessions.

In Scotland, a long-running project called Starcatchers provides further examples of how this work can be supported and sustained.¹⁴

Opening up cultural spaces in museums, galleries, libraries, theatres to the very youngest children and their families would seem to be one of the most valuable contributions that the cultural sector can make to children's development, to social cohesion and to establishing life-long engagement in culture. Open Sesame shows how this can be achieved through collaboration between artists, arts organisations and early years services. For the future it just needs some creative thinking.

14. <http://www.starcatchers.org.uk/professional-development/>

APPENDIX

Project timeline

2014:

October: Notification of successful funding bid

December: *A Winter's Trail* at Brighton Dome / introduction for Year 1 participants

2015:

January–June: Year 1 activity

March: Mini-conference at Towner

September: Year 1 celebration / Year 2 introductory event; Training sessions at Jubilee Library, Brighton

October: Training sessions at Chichester Festival Theatre

November: Induction for Year 2 participants and start of Year 2 programme

2016:

March: Training sessions at Brighton Museum

May: End of Year 2 programme

September: South West Museums training event

November: *All to Play For* conference

Participants Year 1

6 cultural venues with 5 members of staff and 1 volunteer taking part in the full programme, supported by 5 managers

5 Children's Centres with 9 members of staff supported by 5 managers

4 lead artists

St Leonards: Between 14 and 19 families attended each session, and over the 12 sessions, 58 parents and 57 0–2s attended, with 50 parents attending between 1 and 5 sessions, and 8 attending more than 5.

Eastbourne: Year 1, 12 project sessions were run: 7 at Devonshire Children's Centre and 5 at Towner Gallery. All of the sessions were free of charge. Children's Centre figures record 38 parents and 41 children attending overall, with the majority attending between 1 and 5 sessions.

Hastings: Participation in the Open Sesame sessions varied from 6 to 13 families, but they now this has built up to around 30 participants at their regular sessions.

Sorted? development sessions at Downs View – 3 sessions, 12 staff, 32 young people

Participants Year 2

3 cultural organisations with 1 member of staff 2 volunteers and 2 freelancers taking part in the full programme, supported by 3 managers

5 Children's Centres took part with 4 members of staff completing the project

Two training sessions at Hailsham Children's Centre attracted 35 participants

Completion rate of Level 4 course

Year 1: 15 people registered, 14 completed, 7 of these participants had no prior qualifications at Level 4 or above

Year 2: 10 people registered, 7 completed, 4 of these participants had no prior qualifications at Level 4 or above

The Level 4 course was equivalent to a 20 credit module within the first year of a BA degree.

Summary of additional events and level of attendance

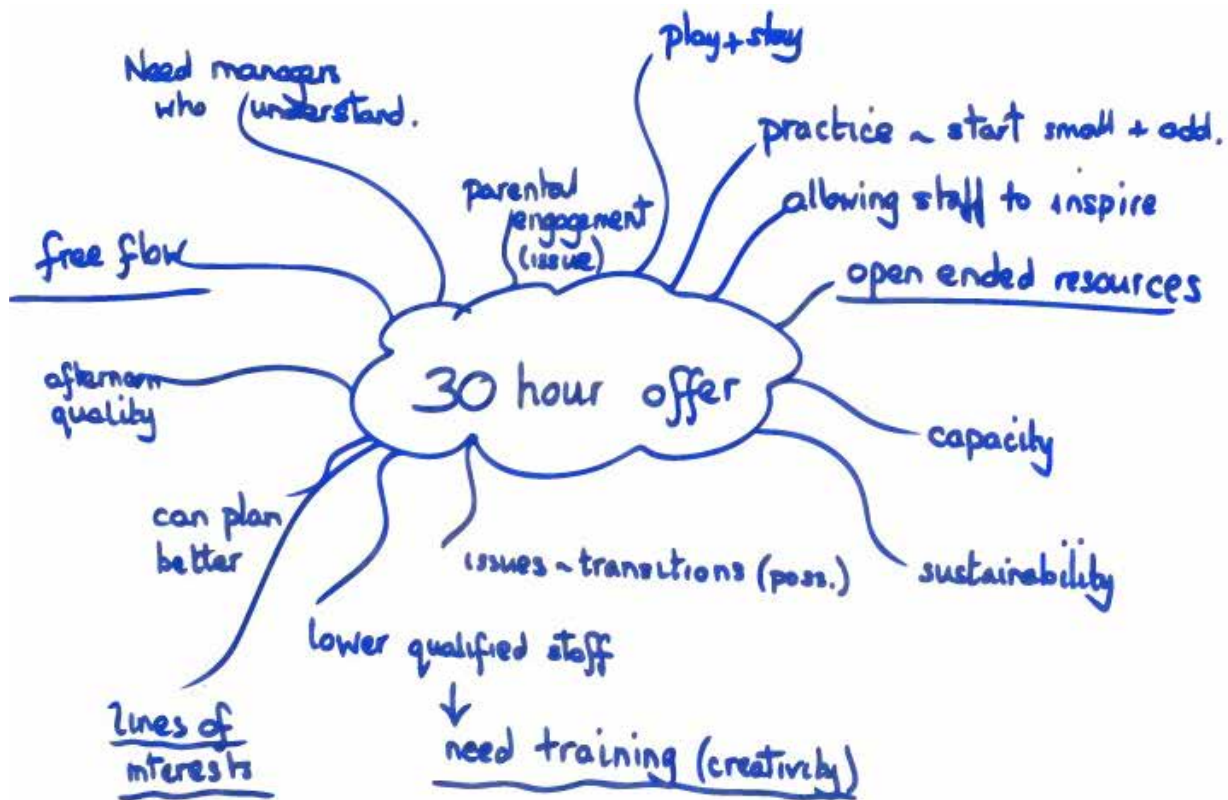
The seasonally themed edition of Octopus Inc's immersive show for 0–2 year olds, *A Winter's Trail*, was delivered to sell-out audiences at the Dome, Brighton during a 4-day run, comprising a total of 12 performances, with approximately 25 parents and children attending each show.

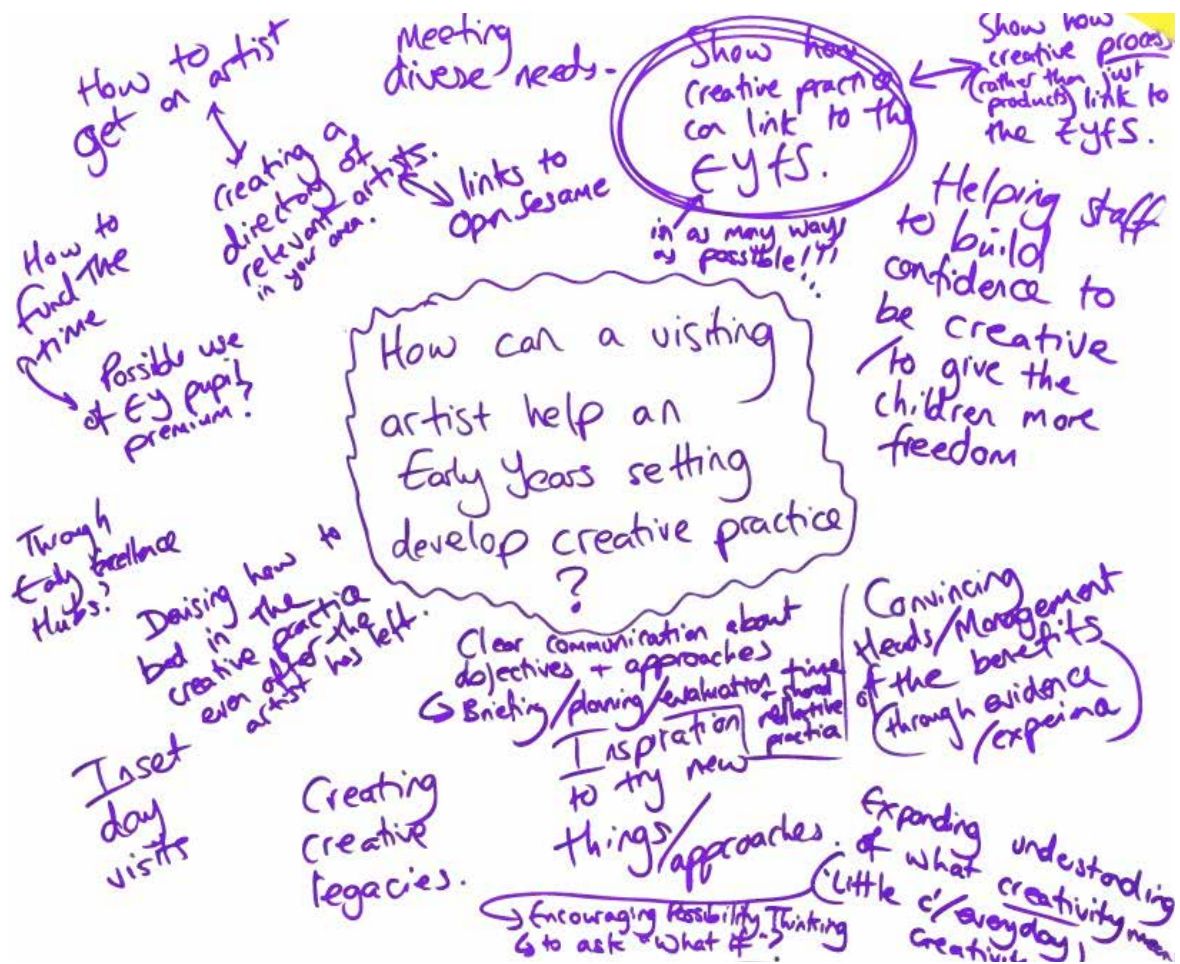
A mini conference event entitled *Creative Practice and Collaborations in Early Years* was held at Towner, Eastbourne, on Wednesday 18 March 2015, and attended by 47 delegates including early years practitioners, venue managers and staff and freelance arts practitioners.

Year 1 celebratory event Monday 28 September 2015, 1.30pm–3.30pm at De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill attended by 35 people.

The *All to Play For* conference was held on 21 November 2016 at the Stade and the Jerwood Gallery, Hastings, attended by 60 participants.

All to Play For – notes from Open Space event





Creativity In Staff that don't have confidence



7.



What creative play opportunities are there for parents / volunteers without children present?

- St Leonards - family Learning - craft + creativity . F.S.N.
- tap into health + WELLBEING.
- cliques - territorial -
- affordability? / access.
- need sustainability - time 2 build up numbers.
- recognition of value of play.
- ? How does having children affect play?
- ? G4A funding structure
- what is an outcome.
- Qualification at the end?
- Legacy - true sustainability.
- investment in people + ownerships - Personal + public.



How can we break down barriers of children getting messy when being creative

Info at pre-meet

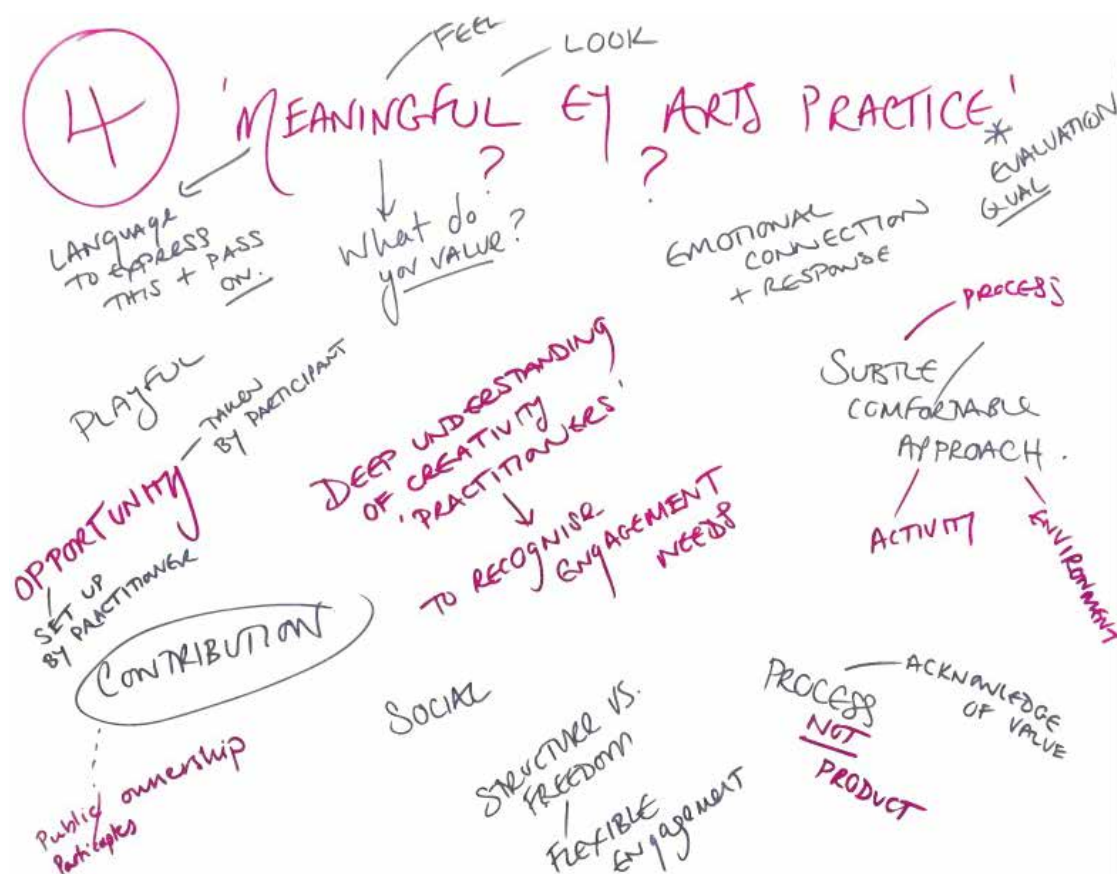
How can you do this at home.

Show photos of children having fun with messy play

List of messy play

At pre-meet Information sheet + photos What are children learning + Development.

Getting the parents to join in



Language through arts...

- language & culture go hand in hand: different soundscapes depending on the country
↳ singing allows for an easier assimilation of language
- Experimenting with colours can lead to historical, cultural awareness & knowledge.
- Use of instruments from all over the world to experiment and discover different approaches and feelings to music.
- Common place sessions
↳ story-telling & translation.

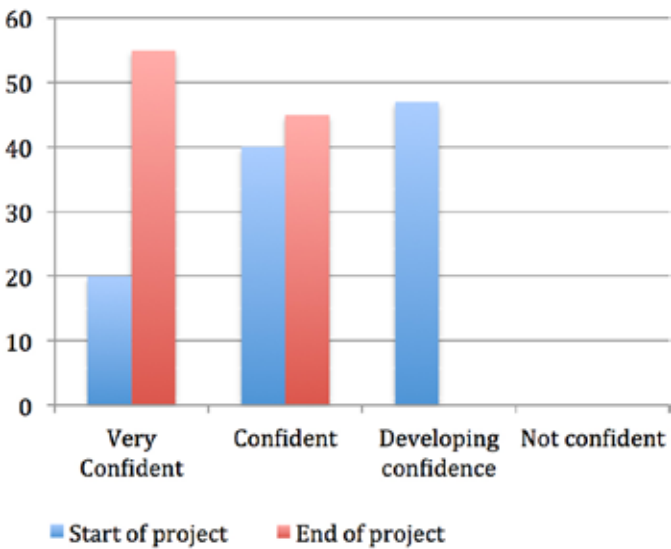
3 / How can we encourage Health to understand creativity?

- * training with
- * invite Health to ^{the} meetings (like today)
- * encourage them to play
- * work together
- * more information on the value of play & Creativity, is needed in the health sector.

Evidence of improvement in skills of artists and practitioners

These charts have drawn on the data from skills surveys of Year 1 participants and show clear progress in confidence and skills in working creatively with 0–2s and using a range of artforms.

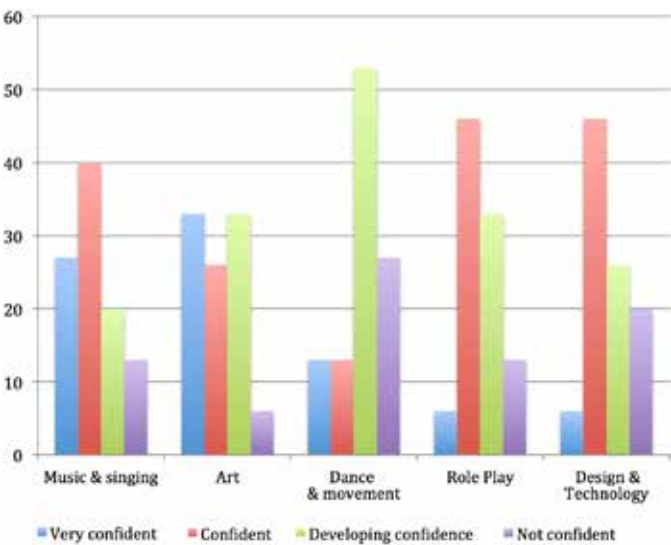
Question: How confident do you feel that you can (or could) work creatively with very young children (birth to 2 years), parents and families?



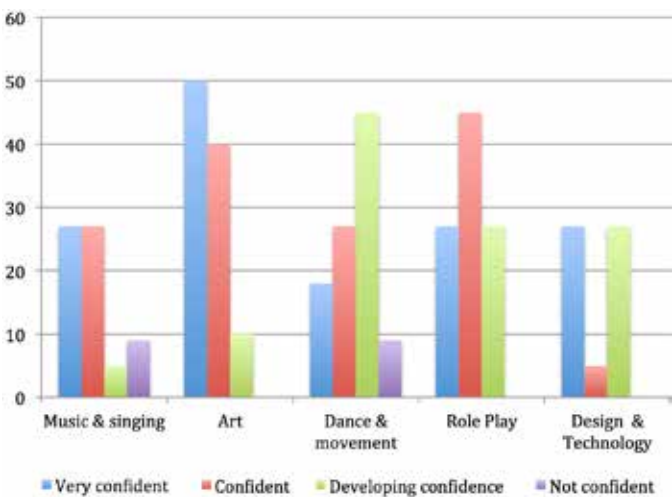
The next two charts show responses from before and after the project.

Question: How confident do/would you feel leading or initiating the following activities with children from birth to 2 years and their families?

Before start of project:



By end of project:



Project artists

Vicky Cave

Anne Colvin

Tom Cook

Jenny Staff

Alex Sutton-Vane

www.octopusinc.org.uk

Funders

Arts Council England

East Sussex County Council Children's Services

East Sussex Arts Partnership

East Sussex Music Hub

Awards for All (Octopus Inc)

Partners

Brighton & Hove Library Service

Brighton Museum

Plymouth University

University of Brighton

Culture Shift team

Cindy Cox

Clare Halstead

Catherine Orbach

Hannah Osmond

Charlotte Semlyen

Becky Smith

www.cultureshift.org.uk

Open Sesame legacy

The screenshot shows the Towner Art Gallery website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: ABOUT, HIRE, ARTIST OPPORTUNITIES, SHOP, NEWSLETTER, CONTACT. A 'DONATE' button and social media icons are on the right. The main header features the 'towner art gallery' logo and 'FREE ADMISSION' details. Below this, there's a section for 'Tiny Towner' events. It states: 'Held every Tuesday from 10.30-12.30 our specially designed Tiny Towner early years sessions are free and open for all under 5s and their parents/carers during both holidays and term times.' It also mentions 'No need to book, just turn up.' and 'Pushchairs can be left in our pushchair park on the ground floor and refreshments along with bottle warming facilities are available in our café on the second floor.' A photo shows two children playing with toys. A 'PRACTICAL INFO' box lists: 'Ages 0-5', 'Free entry', 'Drop-in, no booking required', and 'Children must be accompanied by an adult'. Social media icons are at the bottom.

The screenshot shows the Jerwood Gallery website. The navigation bar includes: WHAT'S ON, VISIT, ABOUT, COLLECTION, NEWS, SUPPORT, SHOP, HIRE, CAFÉ, CHANNEL & BLOG. The main section is titled 'BABY SENSE' and 'ONCE A MONTH ON SELECT WEDNESDAYS'. It describes the event as a 'top-to-tee interactive experience' where visitors can 'Visit the gallery before it opens to the public and explore our current exhibitions and gallery spaces in an open play session for you and your baby.' It mentions that the Education Co-ordinator, Emily Hedley, will be leading the morning's activities. A photo shows a group of people, including children and adults, sitting on the floor and playing with toys in a gallery setting.

The screenshot shows the Brighton Museum website. The navigation bar includes: ACCESSIBILITY, Search, Our Museums, and a 'Share' button. Below this is a 'DISCOVER' section with links to COLLECTIONS, LEARNING, BLOG, GET INVOLVED, PLAY, and WHAT'S ON. The main section is titled 'Babies in Museums' and 'Brighton Museum'. It provides 'Event Details' stating: 'This event is running on selected dates between 10 January 2017 and 4 April 2017. It is next occurring on 4 April 2017 at 11:00 am.' It lists 'Categories: Early Years, Museum Lab' and 'Upcoming Dates: 4 April 2017 at 11:00 am until 1:30 pm'. A note says: 'Please note: there are two sessions on each date 11-11.45am and 12.45-1.30pm. Come along to this fun and stimulating experience for you and your baby/toddler (0-18 months) to explore. Play and learn together in an exciting environment and discover new ways to nurture your child's interests and confidence. Please note the session on Tuesday 7 March has been cancelled.' The 'Admission' section states: '£5 per child (plus Brighton Museum admission, members £4 per child, book in advance, 0-18 months. You can buy tickets online or by telephoning the Events Booking line on 03000 290902 (Mon-Fri), in person at any of our venues. You can also email visitor.services@brighton-hove.gov.uk if you have any queries. A £1.50 booking fee may apply to some events. Tickets cannot be reserved without payment. Please book early as an event may be cancelled if too few tickets have been sold.' A photo shows a child playing with toys.