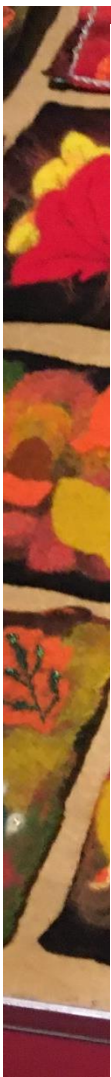


# Project eARTh evaluation

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**SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT  
2020-23**

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**Sarah McNicol**

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# Introduction

Project eARTh is a community arts for health project operating in the High Peak area. It has now been running for over 13 years. The project runs in two locations: New Mills and Buxton. This report summarises the evaluation findings from June 2020 to May 2023.

Prior to March 2020, the project ran two weekly groups, meeting in New Mills and Buxton. Inevitably, the Covid 19 pandemic altered Project eARTh's ability to run its planned programme, and many changes had to be made during the period covered by this report. However, the project adapted to the new circumstances and continued to deliver an arts-based programme for participants. As many participants did not have internet access, or felt able to use platforms like Zoom, the project quickly established a system of postal and door to door delivery of arts projects for participants to do at home, where possible maintaining the ethos of collective working towards a common goal and creating artworks for others. This was supplemented by phone calls for a chat; at WhatsApp group for those who wanted to join and had a suitable device; and emails to those with email addresses.

During periods between lockdowns when group activities were permitted, face-to-face workshops were held once more. However, whilst Covid infections remained a concern, for safety reasons, each group was split into two so as to limit numbers, and allow for participants to be sat 2 metres apart at separate tables, all wearing masks and bringing their own drinks etc. Between autumn 2020 and summer 2021, face-to-face sessions were held fortnightly and half the group attended on alternate weeks in each location. On weeks when they were not attending in person, participants could continue with their artwork at home. Each participant was also provided with an individual 'kit' so as to avoid sharing equipment and materials. This kit included a set of instructions to allow participants to continue their artwork between fortnightly sessions. This also meant that those regular participants who did not yet feel confident to return to face-to-face delivery could take part at home.

Between September 2021 and July 2022, two sessions were held each week at both locations and participants attended either the morning or afternoon session. From September 2022, Project eARTh returned to its original pre-Covid format, with a single group meeting weekly in each town.

Over the three-year period (2020-23), 110 unique participants attended more than once<sup>1</sup>: 25 men and 85 women.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, a small number of people (6 approx.) did the 'at home' projects during Covid lockdowns.

## List of projects June 2020 – May 2023

### **Year 1 (June 2020 - May 2021)**

#### **Ugly Bug Ball (spring/summer 2020)**

This embroidery project was led by artist Amanda Whewell. The idea was to create a quilt for Reuben's Retreat in Glossop by combining individually embroidered squares on the theme of the Ugly Bug Ball. Ninety-three embroidered pieces were received from participants, volunteers and community members. These were sewn together, with tied dyed fabric in between, to make a large quilt, three cushions and a wall hanging.

#### **Pom Poms and Paper wreaths (spring/summer 2020)**

Aware that not everyone could engage with the embroidery, Project eARTh also sent out some simple, fun craft activities to do at home – such as making pom poms and making paper decorations. In addition to the written instructions, photos and materials in the post, the artist Deb Rogers made some 'how to' films for those who could access them.

#### **World Artists for World Kindness Day (June/July 2020)**

Artist Amanda Whewell devised a 'kit' of materials, equipment and information which could be delivered door to door. Each week focussed on an artist from around the world as inspiration, with activity sheets and how-to films. The pdfs and videos were also made available on the HPCA website for anyone who wanted to join in. A selection of finished artworks were printed onto 500 sets of 12 double sided cardboard coasters, given away to local foodbanks for World Kindness Day.

#### **The Felted Fall of Leaves (autumn 2020)**

Led by artist Carol Wilson, this project started in face-to-face workshops, and finished at home during lockdown. The project had an autumn theme, with felting inspired by autumn leaves. Carol framed the 36 completed felt pieces in groups of nine.

#### **Five ways to Wellbeing Bunting (December 2020-February 2021)**

Led by artists Deborah Rogers and Sam Mace of The Cultural Sisters, this project was based on the theme of the 5 ways to wellbeing, to make bunting using a masking tape resist method. It started in face-to-face workshops and was completed at home during lockdown. Again, instructions were available on the HPCA website and Facebook.

#### **#ShowtheLove (February 2021)**

In this mini project, participants decorated postcards for the Climate Coalition's #showthelove project – which were then made into a window display for the office of Robert Largan MP over Valentine's weekend and then displayed in the windows of High Lee Hall.

### **Mexican Embroidery (spring/summer 2021)**

This was another post-out project led by artist Amanda Whewell and inspired by embroidery from the Otomi region of Mexico. The project was in two parts: everyone could be involved in the design phase – and then those who did not wish to embroider could post back their designs for the Project eARTh team to send out to those who did. Those who enjoy embroidery could embroider their own designs and also those of other participants. This project again had films and pdfs available, and other community members could request a kit to join in. The pieces were used to create a wall hanging.

### **Blue John Weaving (spring/summer 2021)**

Led by artist Carol Wilson, this post out weaving project was inspired by Blue John stone. The weaving was done on small card looms following instruction sheets available on the HPCA website and Facebook.

### **Nurture Nature (April-June 2021)**

This project started with the return to face-to-face workshops. Led by artist Amanda Whewell, it was a collage and print based project, inspired by the work of artist Mark Heard who creates art based on British wildlife and flowers. There were at-home kits for those not wishing to attend face-to-face. Participants created 3D cards, garlands and their own collage to be framed and displayed at St. Anne's Parish Centre in Buxton.





## Year 2 (June 2021 - May 2022)

### African Arts and Crafts (July 2021)

The project was devised by Amanda Whewell and delivered by Deb Rogers, based on participants' enjoyment of the World Artists' project. Participants created artwork to keep and take home inspired by Kente cloth from Ghana; the work of artist El Anatsui of Nigeria; Abbia stones from Cameroon; Tinga Tinga art from Tanzania and Kenya; and Kanga Wisdom from Tanzania and Kenya.

The groups also completed projects begun before Covid which it had not been possible to complete during lockdowns.

- **Fused Glass Clocks (Buxton, autumn 2021)**

In Buxton, the groups finished a fused glass clock project, working with artist Deb Rogers to make two clocks, as well as small pieces to take home.

- **Project eARTh Song (New Mills, autumn 2021)**

In New Mills, the group recorded a song about Project eARTh with musician Claire Mooney.

### **Leaf Paper Leaf (Buxton, autumn 2021)**

The Buxton group did a leaf-inspired papermaking and illustration project with artist Mir Jansen, making paper with leaves, then illustrating their handmade paper with silhouettes of leaves. The artworks were framed and given to the new premises of the Zink Project in Buxton.

### **Aprons (Buxton, winter 2021)**

The Buxton group worked with artist Deb Rogers to make their own aprons to wear for messy arts projects in the future.

### **Leaf Release (New Mills, autumn 2021)**

The New Mills group did a fused glass project with artist Kay Stowell, making a variety of small pieces to take home, some glass bunting, and a large collective artwork for Whitfield House, an assisted living centre in Glossop.

### **Seed Exchange (New Mills, December 2021-January 2022; Buxton, March-May 2022)**

Both groups worked with artist Roisin O' Connor to make ceramic vegetables, fruit and flowers for a 'Seed Exchange' structure (a place where residents can leave unused seeds and seedlings, and also take any they might like to grow). The New Mills group made their Seed Exchange for Incredible Edible New Mills and it was placed in the Community Pantry in New Mills Indoor Market. The Buxton Seed Exchange was designed for The Pavilion Gardens, in a partnership with the Serpentine Community Garden. The group also made some Bilberry bees for Buxton railway station.

### **High Peak Communi-Tree (New Mills, February-March 2022)**

The New Mills group did a project making a 'High Peak Communi-Tree' with artist Alison Evans. The project involved participants embroidering leaves for a sculptured tree, on a theme of the High Peak. The tree was given to Spring Bank Arts Centre.

### **Longdendale Ceramic Tiles (New Mills, March-May 2022)**

The New Mills groups worked with artist Helen Newman to create ceramic tiles for the outdoors at Longdendale Environmental Education Centre.





### **Year 3 (June 2022 - May 2023)**

#### **Cyanotypes – Framed Collages (New Mills, summer 2022)**

The New Mills group worked with artist Lucie Maycock on a project to make cyanotypes and then use them to create framed collages for Arden House GP surgery in New Mills.

#### **Shadow Puppets (Buxton, June-July 2022)**

The Buxton group worked with artist Tara Saunders from Babbling Vagabonds Theatre Company on a shadow puppet project. This was for fun amongst participants rather than sharing in the wider community and involved making up stories, puppets, and sound effects, and then acting them out.



### **High Peak ABC (New Mills, summer 2022)**

New Mills Project eARTh got involved in HPCA's 'The High Peak ABC' book project by writing acrostic poems for the High Peak places and names chosen for the book. The group wrote poems in a session led by artist Carl Harris. The project grew out of HPCA's early year's programme, 'For The Love of Books' and the book was launched in April 2023.

### **Light Within (New Mills, July-September 2022)**

The New Mills groups worked with photographer Josh Tomalin and dancer Courtenay Cruse. Participants photographed Courtenay as she danced, and suggested moods, emotions and ideas for the dance. They also wrote some short pieces inspired by the dance. The negatives and photos were used to create light box style sculptures, and a celebratory event held as part of New Mills Festival.

### **Cyanotype Cushions (Buxton, September-October 2022)**

The Buxton group worked with artist Ruth Flanagan to make cyanotype collages, printed onto cushions to give the Befriending Serve at Connex as gifts for World Kindness Day for elderly and /or disabled Buxton residents. They also created individual cards to go with each gift.

### **Book Sculptures (New Mills, September-October 2022)**

The New Mills group worked with artist Kate Freeborough to create book sculptures through folding and cutting pages of old hardback books. The collection of book sculptures was shown at an event at Spring Bank Arts and then displayed in the windows of a local insurance firm.

### **The Nature of Hope (Buxton, October-November 2022; New Mills January-February 2023)**

Both groups worked with writer Leanne Moden on creative writing on the nature of hope. Leanne collated writing from the participants into two group poems, together with illustrations by the groups. Two sets of A3 poetry posters were created and distributed to GP surgeries and community venues by participants.

### **Drawing From Nature (New Mills, November-December 2022)**

The New Mills groups worked with artist Naomi Kendrick on a project using a variety of drawing, painting and collage techniques to draw objects from nature. Each person chose their favourite artwork to make into a set of 12 cards, each with two images. Each pupil in Year 5 of New Mills Primary School was given a set of cards.

### **Silk Painted Banners and Flags (Buxton, January-March; New Mills, March- May 2023)**

Both groups worked with artist Sara Blackburn to create silk painted banners and flags for local organisations: Buxton Festival Fringe, Buxton Pride Picnic, Poole's Cavern and Country Park, the Rock Mill Centre and the One World Festival.

### Mosaics for Townend Community Garden (Buxton, March-July 2023)

The Buxton group worked with artist Tracey Cartledge on making two circular mosaics for Townend Community Garden in Chapel-en-le-Frith on the gardening theme of flowers, fruit and vegetables. The group started with drawing, moved to collages and designs, then practised with soft mosaics, before starting with glass tesserae for the final pieces.

### Sounds that Soothe (New Mills, May-July 2023)

Towards the end of the year, the New Mills group started working with artist Ian Pringle to create soundscapes of relaxing sounds.





## Evaluation methodology

Data were collected using the following methods.

### a. Participant surveys

Short baseline and follow up surveys are completed by Project eARTh participants when they join the project (or in summer 2020 for long-term participants), then at approximately six-monthly intervals. The survey is divided into three sections: making connections; confidence and resilience; and wellbeing, each consisting of a series of Likert type scale questions, plus space for open-ended comments. Surveys are administered by the mental health support worker or other Project eARTh staff. Participants also have the option to self-complete the surveys online. In 2022-23, an exit survey was added for participants who leave the project to capture information about their reasons for leaving and future plans. In this report, follow up surveys at 6 and 18 months are compared to participants' baselines as these are the timepoints with the greatest number of responses.

**b. Workshop feedback forms**

At the start and end of each session, participants are asked to complete a short form asking them to rate their mood at both points, as well as providing open-ended comments on the session.

**c. Observation of workshop sessions**

Over the three years covered by this report, 12 workshop sessions were observed (8 New Mills, 4 Buxton<sup>2</sup>). These visits included observation of the activities and informal conversations with participants.

**d. Observation of celebration events**

The evaluator attended four celebration events (3 New Mills, 1 Buxton). Again, this involved observing the activities and talking to participants and visitors.

**e. Case study interviews with participants**

To explore the impact of Project eARTh on individuals in greater depth, six longer case study interviews were conducted with three participants from New Mills and three from Buxton.

**f. Interviews with artists**

Following each commission, interviews were conducted with artists involved to gather their feedback on the sessions. These interviews were conducted online or by phone. In total, 19 artists were interviewed.

**g. Interviews with volunteers/support workers**

Sixteen interviews were conducted with Project eARTh volunteers/support workers to explore their views on the project. These interviews were conducted online or by phone.

**h. Feedback from organisations where artwork is displayed**

Organisations receiving artworks created through Project eARTh were contacted by email and asked to provide feedback about the artwork. They were also asked about any impact or responses it had provoked from customers/clients or the general public. Fifteen organisations provided feedback.

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<sup>2</sup> Whilst Covid restrictions were in place, observations at Buxton were more difficult due the room size and restrictions on numbers.

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# Project Outcomes

The following section summarises the ways in which Project eARTh has met its outcomes over the three years covered by this report (2020-23).

## Bring people together and building strong relationships in and across communities

There is strong evidence to support the fact that attending Project eARTh helps participants to make connections and build strong relationships. Many participants establish friendships through Project eARTh, and these have often extended beyond the sessions themselves. This is despite the fact that during Year 1 and much of Year 2, bringing people together was extremely challenging due to Covid restrictions. It was a significant achievement that Project eARTh continued to run, in some form, helping to maintain connections within the group. The strength of relationships was demonstrated by the way in which group members supported each other during this time, even when they were not able to meet.

*Members have been staying in touch by phone and email keeping spirits up whilst in lockdown. Like having a second family. It's good to have people who care about you and people to care for. (Year 1 participant)*

The option of bringing people together online was not possible for Project eARTh as many participants did not have internet access and/or IT skills, so the project needed to operate in other ways. Participants in Project eARTh stressed the importance of coming together as a group, particularly when most other activities or social gatherings had stopped. As Covid restrictions eased during the latter half of Year 2 and Year 3, the groups were able to operate more 'normally', making it easier for participants to make connections and enjoy the social benefits of attending. During Years 2 and 3 it was also possible to bring together the New Mills and Buxton groups for joint celebration events, which proved popular amongst participants.

After attending Project eARTh for 6 months, 44% of participants who completed survey had a higher 'score' for 'making connections' than they had done in their baseline survey (n=34). After attending for 18 months, this proportion rose to 59% of participants completing a follow up survey (n=33). After 18 months' attendance, there was a statistically significant improvement in the extent to which participants have 'got to know new people, have been making new friends, or developing existing ones' (n=33, p<0.01).

*I would love to say that High Peak Community Arts has been my lifeline, if it was not for the group, I would not even get dressed any more. I would give in on everything I do. (Year 3 participant)*

## Improve the places and spaces that matter to communities

The limitations on community engagement and the use of community spaces due to Covid restrictions made this outcome was challenging during Year 1. However, during Years 2 and 3, as restrictions started to be lifted, feedback from organisations where Project eARTh artwork has been displayed was highly positive. Representatives from these organisations were clearly impressed with the care taken to ensure that the artworks created enhance the spaces where they will be displayed, as well as fitting with the aims of their organisation in terms of themes or approaches taken. They also report enthusiastic responses to the art from community members who engage with their organisation.

*The artwork was wonderful and the colours especially fit our organisation! We distributed the artwork to some of the people that we befriend. We thought that this was the best way to use them as they will be admired and treasured by the person who has received them knowing all the work that has gone into them. The people who received a cushion were all truly delighted with it; it was a good fit to befriending as our older people are sometimes lonely and isolated. The giving of this artwork meant someone went to visit the older person in their home to pass it on; this was very much appreciated. They also knew that someone had spent the time making it for them, which to some meant a lot. (Connex Community Support Befriending Service, Buxton, Year 3)*

*The artwork...fits perfectly. It is a physical reminder of the wide range of artistic events/groups that take place here, it also represents that we are part of the community and we are here for them as much as they are for us. As a charity and business that aims to bring a variety of arts to the local community that are not available or accessible elsewhere, this tree from an organisation like HPCA arts fits well. (Spring Bank Arts, New Mills, Year 2)*

*At Reuben's Retreat, community is everything. We are based on an army of love and compassionate hearts, and wouldn't be anywhere without our community. We feel like the quilt captures the essence of community beautifully...When we first held the quilt, we were taken aback. It is clear to see how much time and effort has gone into this project, and we think it is just wonderful. All the staff commented on the creativity and the kindness of this gift...This amazing work of art that you have kindly gifted us has moved us all, and we know it will bring a huge sense of comfort to many vulnerable families in their times of need. Thank you, High Peak Community Arts (Reuben's Retreat, Glossop, Year 1).*

## Participants report feeling less isolated by accessing meaningful activities and developing relationships

For a number of participants, Project eARTh is the only social activity they take part in. Many describe how, without Project eARTh, they would feel extremely isolated. During the Covid pandemic in particular, Project eARTh helped to reduce feelings of isolation through providing a continued programme of activities, ongoing contact and face-to-face meetings whenever possible within government guidelines. Participants maintained, and even deepened, relationships within the group over lockdown and were able to access a social activity in a Covid-safe environment whenever it was possible to do so. Even when more activities and services reopened, Project eARTh remained as a highlight of their week for most participants.

After attending Project eARTh for 18 months, there was a statistically significant improvement in the extent to which participants were 'taking part in other activities' and 'getting to know new people...making new friends or developing existing ones' (n=33, p<0.01).

*I was very isolated, but through Project eARTh, I've made friends and they've extended beyond project now, which is really good. It's introduced me to new activities, which in itself has introduced me to more people. I still don't socialise a lot because of health problems, but socialising on Monday [at Project eARTh], is something to look forward to; it means I get out of the house. There's a bit of a purpose to the day. ('Judy', Year 3 case study)*

*Project eARTh makes me get up in the morning, get showered and dressed, have something to eat, then come here. Otherwise, I would just stay in bed all day. It's either sit at home alone and do nothing or come here! It motivates me to come and I talk about it to other friends – there's loads of us stuck at home and we've got nobody. It's a long day when you're on your own. I enjoy coming to the sessions. I like the people; they're always welcoming when you come in. ('Elaine', Year 3 case study)*

*It was a very inclusive group, and everybody was helped to participate in whatever way they could or wanted to. There were some projects where I was happy to collaborate with others, but other times when I wanted to do my own thing and they always tried to accommodate that, which is very good. It was absolutely pivotal to my recovery from a life-threatening situation. I went to Project eARTh for seven years. I'm not the most social person, but I still have friends from that group now. I never felt that I didn't want to go for social reasons, which is quite an achievement for me. I was very comfortable chatting to all sorts of people if I wanted to, or not if I didn't want to. We could be as involved - or not - as we wanted. We could volunteer to help other people out as much as we wanted...Even though I was no longer a*

*participant, I was still invited to join in things during lockdown. If there was a pack to go out, then I got sent one as well and that just made me feel really included. ('Louise', Year 3 case study)*

## Participants gain confidence and self-worth by learning new skills and working collectively to create art works for the community

Participants described how they learn new arts skills through Project eARTh, but also have gain the confidence to think more creatively in their everyday lives. The artistic skills participants gain include more familiar skills, such as drawing, as well as the opportunity to learn techniques new to many, such as glassmaking or photography. In addition to artistic skills, participants learn about nature; learn about themselves and gain confidence; and develop organisational, teamworking and self-management skills.

The act of working as a collective to create a work of art is one of the most important aspects of Project eARTh; for many, this is more meaningful than creating their own individual art alone. In addition, the fact that the artworks created are seen and enjoyed by the local community is a source of immense pride and supports participants' development of self-worth.

*It's absolutely wonderful to know that what we were doing was for public benefit: it's part of the beautiful circularity of it all. That was what differentiates Project eARTh. Any art is good and fantastic: it's great to be creative and I did like every now and again that we could do something that we could make and take home and keep. But the fundamental idea is that you're doing something that is genuinely worthy to be in the public sphere. The community benefits from it: it's improving the environment and bringing that creativity into the environment, but done from a place of real meaning for the people that did the work. I'm not saying that a commissioned artist would be any different in that respect, but it's a very special group of people and there's just a beautiful circularity to it. I still wanted to contribute, but sometimes when you can't. When you're not well enough, you don't have the capacity to go in and volunteer and do something, but this is a way of giving back, genuinely giving back, by giving your time and your thought and whatever you're capable of, in whatever way, shape or form. ('Louise', Year 3 case study)*

*I find I look at the end products and think, "Wow, all the emotions that have gone into that!", and it's brilliant and somebody else can enjoy it. So it's really nice being part of a bigger thing. I really like that, in all of the places where our art's gone, people seem to be very appreciative of it. And it's great doing the launches, celebrating the art. The mayor usually comes so that feels really special that it's going out there to more people. When I'm going around High Peak,*



*sometimes I go to places where our art is and it feels really special to have been a part of that. I like making things for the community and it feels really nice to all work on a project and then give it to somebody and then they know about us; I really liked that part. It's nice to give something; it feels nice to do something and then give it to somebody - it feels like you're giving them a gift. ('Jenny', Year 2 case study)*

## Improvement and maintenance of psychological wellbeing of participants by regular involvement in positive creative activity

There is strong evidence of the positive impacts of involvement in Project eARTh on participants' psychological wellbeing. Participants describe how Project eARTh supports their psychological wellbeing by providing distraction, relaxation, companionship and motivation. Amongst those participants who completed surveys, 59% had a higher 'wellbeing' score after attending the project for 6 months than they had done in their baseline survey (n=34). After attending for 18 months, this proportion had increased to 79% (n=33). In addition, case studies demonstrate how Project eARTh can have a lasting impact on participants' wellbeing, for example, leading to them to undertake voluntary work or feel less likely to require more formal/medical support.

An interesting aspect of the evaluation during Year 1 was that it was possible to separate the creative and social aspects of the project to some extent, as the former continued at times when the latter could not due to Covid restrictions. This demonstrated that, whilst creative activity has positive benefits in its own right, for Project eARTh participants, being involved in creative activity *within a supportive group setting* is key in supporting wellbeing.

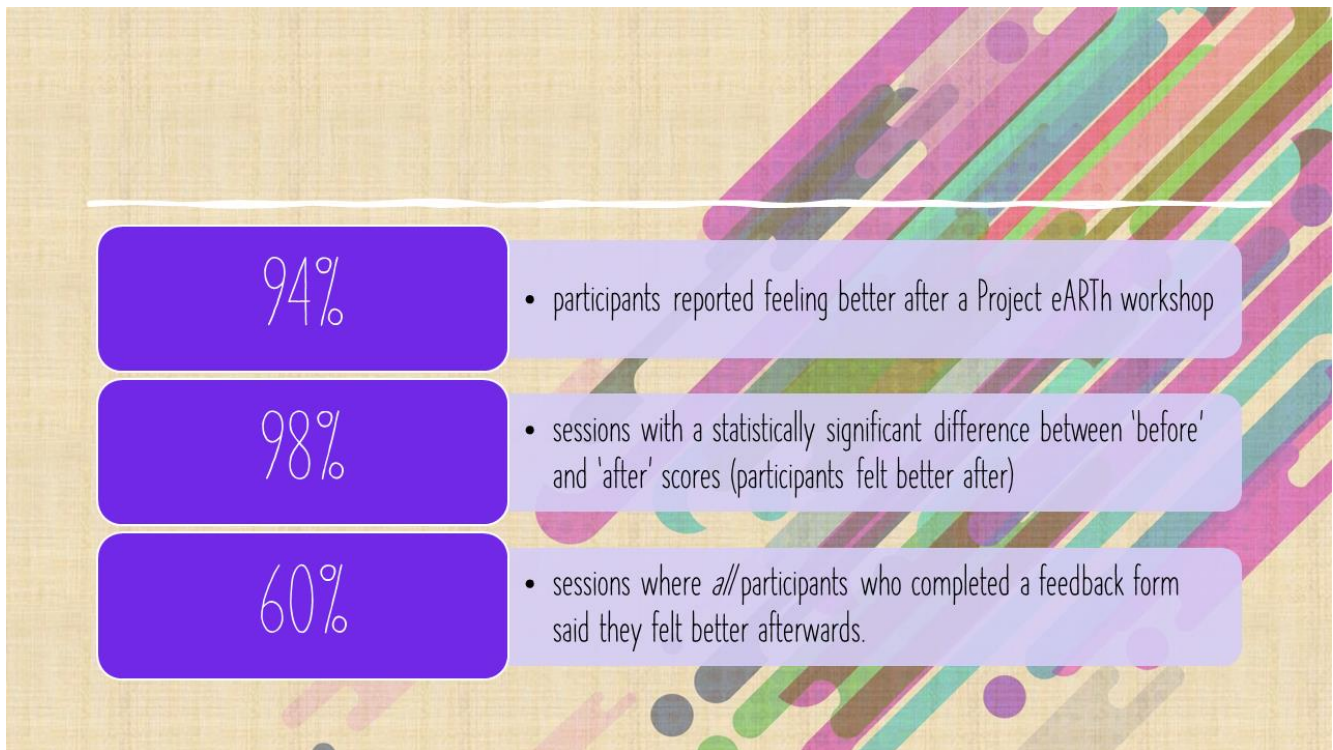
Over all three years, participants reported feeling better after a Project eARTh workshop (or at-home activity) on 94% of occasions (n=1,741). For face-to-face workshops, New Mills participants reported feeling better after a workshop on 96% of occasions (n=890) and Buxton participants on 92% of occasions (n=779).

For 98% of sessions or at-home activities (n=163)<sup>3</sup>, there was evidence of a statistically significant difference between 'before' and 'after' scores (participants felt better after). For face-to-face sessions<sup>4</sup>, there was evidence of a statistically significant difference between 'before' and 'after' scores on 100% of occasions at New Mills (n=73) and 96% of occasions at Buxton (n=82) In 60% of

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<sup>3</sup> Sessions attended by less than 5 participants are excluded due to the difficulty of statistical analysis for sessions with very small numbers of participants.

sessions or at-home activities (n=179) held during the three years, *all* the participants who completed a feedback form said they felt better afterwards.



*From the point of view of wellbeing, Project eARTh has really helped. Everything goes away: you come here; you mess with the clay or whatever; and you just focus in on what you're doing. You get what they call 'flow', where the whole world just goes away for a bit and your only job is to make a beautiful thing - or just make a thing it doesn't have to be beautiful! So, my mental health has been a lot better. It's still not good, but it helps and it's almost kickstarted me into doing stuff at home. I don't make time for art normally, but Thursday morning is the space for art for me. I'm really pleased to be part of this project. ('Helen', Year 2 case study)*

*I was very much out of my comfort zone with creative writing, but I'm glad I did it because it taught me a few things about myself. I realised I could do something I didn't think I could, which was good. It's enabled me to get a few thoughts out onto paper that have been kicking around in my head. ('Judy', Year 3 case study)*

## Enable more people to fulfil their potential by working to address issues at the earliest possible opportunity

Project eARTh continued throughout the Covid pandemic whilst many other activities and support services were not able to. This meant participants benefited from regular contact with both the Project eARTh team, including mental health support workers, and their peers from the group. This provided an opportunity for participants to share their concerns and struggles and better manage their wellbeing than may otherwise have been the case.

*I'm so much better than I was, but it still means an awful lot to me to be able to come here. If Project eARTh stopped, I definitely wouldn't feel as well as I do now. It really, really helps. Having the support worker here means that, if you've got an issue that you're struggling with, there is always somebody to talk to, so you feel like you can reach out and they can give you advice. ('Jenny', Year 2 case study)*

*I can't tell you how much better my mental health is than it was even a year ago. I'd been very, very depressed and I'd had counselling. I was in a really bad way. Joining the project gives me something to look forward to, something I enjoy, people I can talk to. I'm feeling very much more like I belong. I've actually got to the stage now where I'd like to stop being a participant and become a volunteer. I really just like the idea of giving something back and helping people. I know where I was a year ago, so it's nice to think that I can have a little bit of a part in helping other people feel better about things. ('Judy', Year 3 case study)*

## Participants report improved resilience by regular involvement in positive activities and developing relationships

Project eARTh helps to provide participants with a support network to share concerns with, and also increases participants' awareness of other services and organisations within High Peak. After attending Project eARTh for 6 months, 41% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score than they had done in their baseline survey (n=34). After attending for 18 months, 59% of participants had a higher 'confidence and resilience' score (n=33). After both 6 and 18 months, there was a statistically significant decrease in the extent to which participants 'have been feeling anxious or depressed' (n=34, p<0.05; n=33, p<0.05).

*Due to being housebound for 16 weeks I became less confident, more depressed and my social anxiety increased. When I was able to be more physically reunited with the group, I slowly gained a bit more confidence and I'm more able to attend social situations with the group's support. (Year 3 participant)*

*It's helped me to feel better, to feel less nervy being around people. My confidence has really increased since I started coming to Project eARTh and it has made me socialise in the way that I used to do. ('Lorna', Year 2 case study)*

During the Covid pandemic, Project eARTh played a particularly important role in helping participants to cope by maintaining regular contact and providing positive activities. Even those participants who were not able to take part in activities commented that the ongoing contact and support from the Project eARTh team and their peers in the group was valuable at a difficult time.

*The projects give me a purpose, a way of doing something for someone else. A connection to the outside world. (Year 1 participant)*

## Conclusions

The evaluation of Project eARTh between 2020 and 2023 has highlighted many strengths of the project. The following examples are among the most notable elements that distinguish Project eARTh from many similar projects and activities.

1. Creating art for the local community supports participants' sense of pride and self-esteem and allows them to feel they are giving something back to their local community.
2. Project eARTh staff have an in-depth understanding of the needs of participants. This is not only evident in the ways in which workshops are organised and supported, but it also allowed them to find ways to continue during Covid when many similar activities and services stopped.
3. Participation is not time-limited and participants can continue to attend as long as they feel it is necessary to support their wellbeing.
4. In addition to compelling qualitative testimony, there is strong statistical evidence to support the benefits of attending Project eARTh for participants' wellbeing and ability to make connections within the community.

Nevertheless, there are a number of challenges facing Project eARTh. The most pressing include the following.

1. Numbers in the groups, as well as diversity of participants' needs, have increased and there is continuing demand for places. This demonstrates the value of Project eARTh for members of the local community, but can make delivering high quality experiences more challenging for staff and artists.
2. In common with many community arts activities, Project eARTh faces ongoing funding challenges. This pressure has been exacerbated during this evaluation period by cuts to local authority community arts funding.