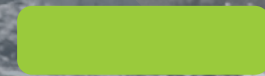


A photograph of a woman in a light-colored jacket with a fur collar leaning over a young child. The child is wearing a paper crown and is using a hand saw to cut a piece of wood on a wooden workbench. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a workshop or festival setting.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

A CASE STUDY REPORT ON SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
IN THE BIRMINGHAM 2022 FESTIVAL



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

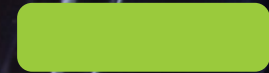
This report has been prepared by Amanda Roberts, Fahmida Choudhury, Ammo Talwar and Simon Redgrave of Punch Records, Katy Raines and Tori Moore of Indigo-Ltd, Jordan Gibbs, Kristine Royall, Shannon Pearse and John Knell of Culture Counts™, in association with Jonothon Neelands.

We would like to thank Birmingham 2022 Festival for their support through the development and delivery of the evaluation project, and in particular Rachael Magson and Fabio Thomas.

We would also like to particularly thank all the B2022 Festival projects who took time to explain and share their work; and stakeholders including public patrons, artists, participants, volunteers and staff for their participation in this project.

Report Produced By:

indigo



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5	CASE STUDY: FLOW (CHILDREN'S BIENNIAL)	20
Festival Commissioning Model	6	Flow (Children's Biennial): Need and Opportunity	20
Festival Curatorial Lines	6	Flow (Children's Biennial): People and Place	21
Skills Development	6	Flow (Children's Biennial): Design and Delivery	22
Methodology	8	Flow (Children's Biennial): Legacy and Learning	23
CASE STUDY: CONGREGATION (CREATING DANGEROUSLY)	9	CASE STUDY: BESPOKE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	25
Congregation (Creating Dangerously): Need and Opportunity	9	Bespoke Skills Development: Need and Opportunity	25
Congregation (Creating Dangerously): People and Place	10	Bespoke Skills Development: People and Place	26
Congregation (Creating Dangerously): Design and Delivery	11	Bespoke Skills Development: Design and Delivery	27
Congregation (Creating Dangerously): Legacy and Learning	12	Bespoke Skills Development: Legacy and Learning	28
CASE STUDY: FESTIVAL SITES	14	CONCLUSION	32
Festival Sites' Neighbourhood Producers: Need and Opportunity	14	What Worked	33
Festival Sites' Neighbourhood Producers: People and Place	15	Key Conclusions	34
Festival Sites' Neighbourhood Producers: Design and Delivery	16	Looking Forward	34
Festival Sites' Neighbourhood Producers: Legacy and Learning	17	APPENDIX	37



THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS!



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



INTRODUCTION

This report represents an element of the wider Birmingham 2022 Festival (B2022 Festival) Evaluation. The B2022 Festival sought to undertake an outcomes-based evaluation, grounded in a Theory of Change model developed by the Organising Committee for the B2022 Commonwealth Games and the B2022 Festival. The Theory of Change and subsequent evaluation framework contained seven short-term outcome areas.

Some of those areas necessitated the development of case studies that would complement the quantitative data within the framework and delve deeper into understanding the impacts and effects of different elements of the B2022 Festival programme. This report is one of those case study reports.

This report and its associated research were undertaken by Amanda Roberts, Fahmida Choudhury and Simon Redgrave of Punch Records, supervised by Ammo Talwar. It focuses on the outcome area 'Skills Development'. This outcome area related to the participation of local communities engaging with programmes offered as part of the B2022 Festival, as well as the quality and outcomes that those programmes delivered. Case studies in this report focus on 'participating local communities'.

Punch proposed an adapted research methodology from Scheerens et. al (2003)¹ that would embed them in a selection of projects within B2022 Festival, and would consider the context, inputs, process, and outputs of those projects in a manner that could speak to the overall outcomes of B2022 Festival and its co-creation objective. Projects featured as case studies were selected in consultation with B2022 Festival, based on the implementation of their programming strategy and our understanding of the outcome area.

Can I congratulate Punch on their incredible efforts in conducting and delivering research that meaningfully engaged participants across the programmes featured in this report by embedding themselves into the creative delivery process, all the while maintaining an outcomes-focused mindset to their work. It speaks to the value of embedded research within creative practice, and this uncovers findings that should aid those working across creative policy and practice alike.

In addition to the evidence presented as part of this report, and the two other case study reports produced by this team relating to 'Skills Development' and 'Co-Creation', B2022 Festival has commissioned a further five evaluative reports, which look deeper into particular projects or clusters of work.

These are as follows:

- International Collaboration – The Audience Agency
- Critical Mass – The Audience Agency
- LGBTQ+ Space – Dr Roz Stewart-Hall
- Creative City Grants Programme - M·E·L Research
- Route 34: North Birmingham Alliance – Earthen Lamp

We encourage you to read about the B2022 Festival and its associated outcomes in all eight of the case study reports, as well as in the overarching evaluation report.

Sincerely,

Professor Jonathan Neelands,

on behalf of the Indigo-Ltd Consortium Evaluation Team

¹ Scheerens, J., Glas, C.A., Thomas, S.M. and Thomas, S., 2003. Educational evaluation, assessment, and monitoring: A systemic approach.



FESTIVAL COMMISSIONING MODEL

B2022 Festival was able to direct the scale, focus and content of its public programme through its Strategic Commissioning and Distribution Model².

This allowed for the development of large-scale collaborative 'major' commissions alongside 'micro' commissions which could 'address remaining programming gaps'. There were 'open calls' for work responding to specific themes - digital, trams, sport, black art movement and nature. There was a locally focused fund with support from the local authority (Birmingham City Council) - "Creative City Grants", which aimed to fill the city with artworks co-created by communities and artists. There were 'sector development' programmes to support artist and community development, and an inclusive mass participation programme, entitled 'Critical Mass'. Additionally, there was scope for 'aligned' third-party projects to be supported by B2022 Festival's marketing and communications programme and via a brand license.

FESTIVAL CURATORIAL LINES³

B2022 Festival developed three clear 'curatorial lines' as starting points to shape the thinking of artists and organisations proposing work. These were:

1. Our Place in The Commonwealth - the celebration of Birmingham as the Commonwealth Games host should be in the context of "honest conversations about ... the Commonwealth and its origins."
2. The Present Moment - a conceptual focus on current issues which "can reveal and enable the collective and often unrealised power of youth and youthfulness."
3. Stories Of Birmingham and The West Midlands - exploring "rich, untold and living history" through "stories that shape our identity and perspectives ... that resonate with people ... connect us to our place in the world, that come from here but are universal."

In addition to the conceptual shaping offered through the curatorial lines, there was an additional practical focus on commissioning work that would directly involve and engage audiences, for example, through 'public activations' - experiential public art - as well as through more traditional participatory programmes and events.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The B2022 Festival contained a broad skills development offer. This report focuses on activities where a clear experience of growth in ability and confidence was expressed by individuals from local communities through their active participation in the B2022 Festival. Wherever possible, this report addresses participants' perceptions of the quality and impact of those programmes, and their likelihood to continue those activities in future. Co-creation skills development specifically for the mainstream creative and cultural workforce is addressed in the Co-Creation Case Study Report. This report foregrounds the skills development offer to volunteers and participants, as well as emerging and established practitioners who consider themselves part of, or representing, their communities.

² B2022 Commonwealth Games Cultural Programme Business Case, August 2020

³ B2022 Commonwealth Games Cultural Programme Business Case, August 2020 and the B2022 Cultural Programme Evaluation Strategy, March 2021.



**“IT WAS SO LOVELY TO SEE HOW
INDEPENDENT AND INDIVIDUAL ALL THE
CHILDREN WERE”**

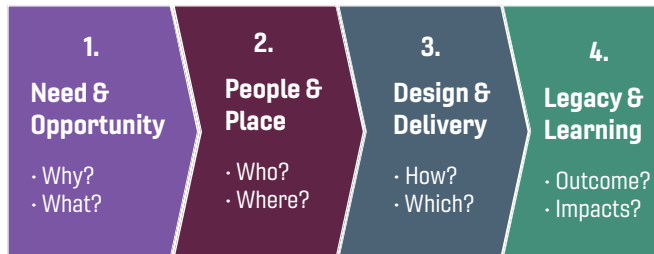
PARENT / CARER - INTERVIEW

FLOW: Children's Biennial, Build Your Own Arts Centre. image by Paul Stringer



METHODOLOGY

Throughout the B2022 Festival, qualitative information and non-numerical data has been collected, gathered, and analysed from many project partners. This data includes interviews, reflections, photographs, video evidence, project reports, social media, and artworks, and informs this whole of this report. To aid in the development of our in-depth case studies, additional interviews were held with those directly involved with the projects namely producers, audience members, project teams and artists. Throughout the process the following research methodology has been used to reference the overall Theory of Change and to draw out the key points of the short-term objectives.



This report contains case studies of the following commissioned programmes: Congregation (Creating Dangerously) – Grand Union, Festival Sites, Flow (Children’s Biennial) - Birmingham and Sandwell) and B2022 Festival’s bespoke Skills Development work - namely, Diversity in Leadership and Convene, Challenge, Connect. This sought to develop the independent freelance sector including a broad range of art-forms, whilst positively

diversifying the broader workforce within the regions creative industries. Each of the case studies presents insights across the four-stage outline above, and the report concludes with a closing section summing up skills development across B2022 Festival and suggesting implications for future work.

Some written responses have been re-presented 'verbatim'; responses from in-person interview transcripts have been edited to remove 'filler words' and duplications. Some interviewees requested to remain anonymous - or that their opinions on particular topics remain unattributed. Accordingly, personal identifiers have been typically redacted throughout the document, unless their identity is pertinent to the point being made. (Following Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence, Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis and Dillon, Cabinet Office 2003)



CASE STUDY: CONGREGATION (CREATING DANGEROUSLY)

Congregation ([Grand Union](#) with artist Alberta Whittle); March - September 2022; Minerva Works (Digbeth), Birmingham Cathedral and other neighbourhood locations

CONGREGATION (CREATING DANGEROUSLY): NEED AND OPPORTUNITY

“The idea of a growing project emerged from the process of building relationships, where [Grand Union’s] collaborative programme curator recognised an opportunity to make a positive difference to the empty garden beds in St Anne’s Hostel in Digbeth.”

Grand Union project document

Grand Union commissioned Congregation as an 18-month intervention featuring art, workshops, and community gardening. Congregation creatively addressed the decline in creative cultural skills such as growing and cooking, as well as eating together as a collective ritual and celebration of that culture and creativity. The Growing Project is a network of hyper local sites across the city, including the commission in focus at Minerva Works, Digbeth, on the canalside by Grand Union’s current and future creative home.

In their project development documents, Grand Union suggested that the Commonwealth Games was the “crucial backdrop” to their project, which revisited the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act to explore issues of freedom, ownership, and healing. Congregation was delivered as a four-part collaborative

project comprising a public sculpture, gardening, and growing workshops, a “harvest dinner” and an exhibition with two commissioned films which placed Birmingham’s own Shades of Black gardening project led by community activist Mrs McGhie at its heart, all helmed by Grand Union and lead artist Alberta Whittle.

Artistically, Congregation’s centrepiece was Alberta Whittle’s Bothy, an installation on the canal side at Minerva Works. This was an interactive sculpture for rest and shelter located next to the Minerva Apothecary Garden. The Garden provided a platform for learning, creative and hands-on skills development activities, and the Bothy a place for: “community meetings and organising ... holding the memories of groups [and] reimagining new possibilities of freedom” (project website).

“The sculpture contributes to the Minerva Works Apothecary Garden, cared for by The Growing Project’s women’s group. It is an example of the mutual enrichment of Grand Union’s international artists programme and the local and hyperlocal nature of The Growing Project.”

The Growing Project report



Congregation (Creating Dangerously) Apothecary Garden
- Image by Amanda Roberts



Congregation (Creating Dangerously) Bothy - Image by Patrick Dandy



CONGREGATION (CREATING DANGEROUSLY): PEOPLE AND PLACE

Congregation welcomed participants who were isolated from their families or from community-based activities, those who were unsheltered, from low socio-economic backgrounds, vulnerable, homeless, isolated from society and/or requiring tailored support needs. For example, service users from Midlands-based women's centre Anawim and Crisis Skylight were two community engaged charities working closely with the project. Anawim's service users were encouraged to participate and as the project unfolded, peer to peer and self-referrals were evident as a sign of its growing social comradery. Crisis Skylight is focussed on the specific needs of homeless people, supporting service users back into accommodation and giving homeless people tools and knowledge they can use to thrive independently. With surrounding support such as travel costs/ taxi collection, volunteers became active regulars contributing to weekly and project focused tasks from hosting the Bothy Opening to making quilts for Whittle's exhibition.

Congregation's participants came together for weekly workshops in a public open space adjacent to the gallery in Digbeth, on the banks of the Grand Union canal, facilitated by Artist Gardeners and Chefs. This was a reclaimed space, a discreet stretch of the canal under a five-year adoption arrangement from the Canal & River Trust, refitted with planters, seating and outdoor cooking facilities. It was collaboratively co-designed and planted with herbs by female participants with the support of a local artist gardener, a 'women's group' forming through its activation. The Growing Project holds a network of hyper-local sites including St Anne's Hostel, and one participant

began volunteering elsewhere during this project, increasing her confidence and building experience to shape their application for further training and eventual employment.



Congregation (Creating Dangerously) Bothy - Image by Patrick Dandy



CONGREGATION (CREATING DANGEROUSLY): DESIGN AND DELIVERY

“Pretty much everything that night was either grown or made by somebody involved with the project, which was pretty cool.”

Project Participant - Interview

Congregation provided a platform to determine and respond creatively to the practical needs of participants, creating a peer support network and a programme of workshops offering traditional creative cultural skills. It was through these workshops that the Minerva Apothecary Garden was developed. Planted with herbs and perennial plants, the space served as a source of healing – an apothecary – with a dedicated section for medicinal plants.

Participants met together for weekly workshops in the Garden. These sessions enabled the group to undertake familiar and new tasks: crafting, planting, composting, caretaking, printing, and painting. Workshops were facilitated by Artist Gardeners and Chefs and designed to develop skills in growing and cooking. Plants that participants had grown themselves were used to create “teas, oils, ointments, compresses [and] tinctures” (website) and recipes were developed and shared. Grand Union explored ways that ‘enterprise’ could be considered and developed including the sale of the hand blended ‘Teas of Resistance’ accompanying Whittle’s show at the Venice Biennale (2022).

“The women have been supported by artist Carolyn Morton to curate tea combinations that celebrate and empower women. Each teabag in this pack has been designed by each woman in the group. They centre warmth, energy, bliss, strength, peace, and mindfulness.”

Project Website, Grand Union

These workshops led to a variety of public sharing opportunities, for example, the 2022 Harvest Dinner, held on 16 September 2022 at Warwick Bar (relocated from Birmingham Cathedral due to the passing of Queen Elizabeth II). The lead artist, the Grand Union team, project participants, and other collaborators and community members involved in the food poverty movement came together to celebrate the communal effort with a meal from the harvest of the community gardens. The gathering served to activate and amplify conversation and collective action highlighting injustice around land rights, food poverty and issues of climate justice evident within our city and global communities.

“Passing narrowboats - smile as I litter pick each week, I realise that the empty cans, bottles, and cigarette butts are another sign of people using it as a quiet refuge. They might drop litter but there’s no graffiti or damage, it’s a space that welcomes and embraces everyone.”

Project Participant - Interview

HARVEST DINNER

MENU

Starter:

Selection of Stirchley breads
Garden salad
Marrow & courgette dip, pickled courgette, feta (coconut feta ve)

Main:

Ratatouille Frittata, tomato sauce, dressed rocket
Ratatouille, tomato sauce, dressed rocket (ve)

Pudding:

Autumn pavlova, whipped cream, plum compote
Aquafaba pavlova, oat cream, plum compote, flowers (ve)



Congregation: events at Canalside - Image by Nina Baillie

CONGREGATION (CREATING DANGEROUSLY): LEGACY AND LEARNING

“My confidence has completely changed. When I first started, I was a bit wary of everybody, but now, it’s amazing. I just love it all...Speaking to different people is a big thing for me as well. Normally with a group I’m a bit “can’t do this”, but since I’ve been here, I can do it.”

Project Participant - Interview

Congregation is building a sustainable community around a curated outdoor site and the development of the skills required to tend and maintain it; and themselves, and each other. This was accomplished alongside and with the local community rather than for them or to them. The disparate elements of the project - for example, the Bothy and the Garden - were successfully brought together to provide a coherent artistic programme which left a complex legacy rooted in community cohesion and personal growth.

“My cooking is all different now. I used to just cook frozen, now I use the fresh stuff we grow”

Project Participant - Interview

Congregation demonstrated the potential effectiveness of artistic intervention as a social tool, successfully adopting grassroots approaches to building the appetite for social connection outside of everyday environments (at times some participants had previously not even felt able to leave their own residence), developing an appetite for activity, new knowledge and creative skills sharing which are both practical and have

cultural significance to participants. Grand Union’s thoughtful selection of and engagement with partner stakeholders ensured strong retention of participants throughout the programme, many of whom were overcoming significant personal challenges. It placed ‘Care and Self Care’ central to the work, echoing the wider sentiment of repair, resilience and restoration that flows through Minerva Works Garden and its ecosystem of relationships. On a more basic level, the women share their increased fitness and ability to walk to the taxi or up the three flights of stairs to the gallery unaided, echoing their greater appetite to access other parts of life.

“We’ve learnt about herbs and plants and how they can heal us, but more than that they’ve been a way to consider and address our needs. Planting herbs and seeing how they grow in communities, despite little water, much heat and intermittent tending has been a source of wonder and joy.”

Project Artist

“Blending teas is a different way of communicating”

Project Participant - Interview

There was a notable increase in participants’ confidence to be themselves, to try something new and to support each other, which is not without challenge for those with depleted emotional resilience. Participants recognised the role that creative activity and gentle listening can offer as a salve to themselves and others. Through the project, they all gained new ways to

connect and communicate with each other and those perceived ‘in positions of power’ - including Grand Union staff and artists employed. Through the public facing event programme they have had to navigate new social situations and connect to new parts of the city, which in the long term will open wider possibilities for them. The project provided a safe physical and physiological space for participants, staff, and delivery agents to connect and collaborate, evidenced by the popular weekly shared lunch that brought them together.

“You build community and friendship”

Head of Collaboration, Grand Union - Interview

Grand Union is exploring models of social enterprise that could best support and develop the project in the long term. Their collaborative programme curator has made connections with Price Waterhouse Cooper’s (PWC) social enterprise entrepreneur programme. They are in discussions to enable Congregation teas to be sold in PWC’s canteen and it is already part of their own organisation’s website alongside other creative work the women have made (e.g., seasonal artist cards). This shift to embed commercial potential can expand and diversify the partnership and sponsorship base to sustain the project in the long term. In the short term, participants have been offered some temporary paid employment opportunities, but the enterprise model harnessed could provide clear pathways to employment. A participant had also begun to shadow/support the Artist Gardener at other Growing Project sites to develop their horticultural experience, and with Grand Union’s continued support, they articulated that a Level 3 Diploma in Horticulture is on their horizon.

This project is a reciprocal social model, which recognises and nurtures people's talents and strengths, their contribution to their environment and the people around them – strengthening agency and the interconnectedness of a place, opening the potential to further new skills.

The commission from the B2022 Festival served to successfully amplify an ongoing artist-led project, with additional creative outcomes providing new commissioning opportunities with Alberta Whittle (the Bothy, exhibition, event programme), her vision and skill carefully weaving sustained creative opportunities for the Women's Group's outputs (e.g. their art works inhabited a wall of the exhibition space; a participant designed the invitation to The Harvest Dinner; and a co-designed quilt with artist Sandra Golding and members of the general public.) The events programme threaded a line of public and private gatherings, such that even if the female participants were not present at the public events, the pride in the association was evident. However, more could have been considered to attract and engage wider and new audiences for the public facing outcomes including collaborative audience development with the other environmentally charged commissions such as Abundance by Spectra, Flow (Children's Biennial) by The Parakeet CIC and Trigger's PoliNations as part of the UNBOXED programme.

Grand Union's gallery has partial opening hours which were subject to change, and at times significantly reduced throughout the run to accommodate their other scheduling demands, which may have impacted first time/non arts attendees. More specifically, it is not clear what extra marketing activity took place to expand their profile in more diverse and non-contemporary visual arts networks.

The Gallery launch events are linked to the popular Digbeth First Friday event, which attracts an art-engaged crowd familiar with Grand Union's work. It prompts consideration for what other formats in the public programme have been considered to connect audiences in other (hyper local) neighbourhoods who could then be encouraged to come to the Minerva spaces (in situ, at other locales and on line).

Their current gallery is not accessible for wheelchair users or those with physical disabilities (it is on a third floor), with the Minerva Apothecary and the Bothy also having step access and some uneven surfaces en-route to the garden. Recognising Grand Union's staggered relocation to its new accessible venue (Junction Works), this commission could have provided the opportunity to widen and /or deepen other access priorities for audiences, to meet its longer-term objectives. The Harvest audience was co-curated by Grand Union and Alberta Whittle, with a deliberate mix of the wider Growing Project stakeholders and those in the food/growing and climate activism communities. This event undoubtedly had an impact and prompted a positive response, debate, and tangible activism from those attending, but further work is needed to continue to expose the narrative communicated.

The rewards of this work are evident, and the commission leaves Grand Union with tangible creative assets to increase its audience reach and widen its sphere of influence and start to reshape civic policy. This project places the arts as a social tool that can be central to addressing food poverty, community cohesion and social care including the potential exploration around Social Prescribing or Arts/Green Prescriptions.

There is currently a gap in creative climate leadership in the city, which would place Grand Union in a strong position to shape a critical mass, uniting partners such as General Public (who are collaborating with Birmingham Allotment Society), The Active Wellbeing Society's "red shed" movement, Growing Up Green Festival, and Ampersand Forest Schools etc. Ideally the success of this project should influence Birmingham City Council to fully recognise the potential for the arts in the Urban Nature/Green and Wellbeing agendas, and to shape appropriately the strategic scope of the Birmingham and national Future Parks Accelerator (a National Trust and National Heritage Lottery Fund).

As this burgeoning participant and potential stakeholder base grows, it will remain challenging for the organisation to sustain such an intensive and holistic person-centred approach within its core resources - this places a vulnerability onto a human ecosystem that is striving towards resilience. There is significant opportunity to consider other collaborative funding and investment models which cross voluntary, statutory and philanthropic realms. Looking ahead, the Minerva Apothecary Garden is getting ready to hibernate for winter, but the future development of the garden and the expanded use of the Bothy in seasons to come is full of abundant reward.

'How do we gather? (What is the danger of audience and artist coming together... Common Wealth...finding hope, the world we want to create'

Alberta Whittle (Artist) - Interview



CASE STUDY: FESTIVAL SITES

Festival Sites Neighbourhood Producers (Outdoor Digital Productions); Events: July - August 2022. Skills Development: January - June 2022.

FESTIVAL SITES' NEIGHBOURHOOD PRODUCERS: NEED AND OPPORTUNITY

"I have worked in events in the past, but it was long ago and would definitely benefit from some refreshing!"

Neighbourhood Festival Sites Producer - Interview

Festival Sites were a core part of B2022 Festival and wider Commonwealth Games delivery, having been key to the Games' experience since 2002. Festival Sites typically comprised free-to-enter locations with a defined perimeter; performance, participation, or entertainment elements; screen provision; and food and beverage offer. "This is the first time that the Commonwealth Games Festival Sites have sat within the Cultural assets of a Games. This means alongside watching the sporting activity on screen there will be brilliant FREE cultural performances, installations, and celebrations" (Community Connector Call Out).

Described in the 'Community Connector Call Out' document as 'The city's own Front Room to the Games', Festival Sites and Neighbourhood Festival Sites reached audiences and participants in the city centre (Victoria Square & the new Smithfield Site - which was also the competition venue for 3X3 Basketball and Beach Volleyball as part of the sporting competition schedule) and seven neighbourhood locations: Castle Vale, Edgbaston, Handsworth, Selly Oak, Sparkhill, Ward

End and Yardley. Neighbourhood Festival Sites featured locally programmed participatory events and performances, as well as 'big screen' connectivity to the B2022 Commonwealth Games along with a collaborative sports partner (locally connected club or a national sporting body e.g., England Rugby), (what some audiences perceived to be) a limited food and drink offer, outdoor performances from Ascension Dance and a participatory arts project from Friction Arts. Nine towns and cities across the region, as well as London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, also hosted equivalent provision. Festival Sites provided an opportunity to make the B2022 Commonwealth Games and the cultural programme more accessible outside the City Centre, but also provided an integrated strand of locally led producer development to sustain local neighbourhood's cultural asset beyond the B2022 Commonwealth Games.



Festival site - image by B2022 Festival



Festival site - image by Rajab Mahmood



FESTIVAL SITES' NEIGHBOURHOOD PRODUCERS: PEOPLE AND PLACE

"[We are] hearing residents say they are proud of seeing something like this in their area"

Neighbourhood Festival Sites Producer - Interview

One of the animating logics in the delivery of Festival Sites was to encourage and build community agency, with Festival Sites projects seeking to:

- empower community event organisers and producers to host Festival Sites in their neighbourhoods,
- give visibility to unheralded communities,
- bring high quality activity to communities which typically face barriers to inclusion in cultural and sporting activity.

The Festival Sites tender was awarded to a newly formed, and temporary entity, Outdoor Digital Productions (ODP), a collaborative enterprise between ADI, JA Productions and Outdoor Places Unusual Spaces (OPUS).

Neighbourhood sites were programmed by a locally based Neighbourhood Producer who would programme the event with support from within the OPUS team, forging relationships with local stakeholders and residents. Each Neighbourhood also recruited a specific Community Connector who "supported with connecting to local groups and stakeholders, introductions, local knowledge about the local communities, advocates for their community, hosting meetings/focus groups, spreading the word across the community" (Community Connector Call Out).

The seven local Community Connectors were: Compass Support Services, Castle Vale; Sense Touchbase Pears (STBP), Selly Oak; The Springfield Project, Sparkhill; Birmingham Settlement, Edgbaston; Oasis Community Hub Hobmoor, Yardley, Olive Branch 2 CIC, Handsworth and the Unity Hubb, Ward End.



Ward End Festival Site. Image by Ross Jukes

FESTIVAL SITES' NEIGHBOURHOOD PRODUCERS: DESIGN AND DELIVERY

"Everyone was a headache, and I was probably a headache at some point"

Neighbourhood Festival Sites Producer - Interview

The model placed emphasis towards 'learning on the job', integrating a training and skills programme alongside this called EmPOWer, and accessible to all those involved in B2022 Festival's delivery at the Festival Sites. Running across January to August 2022, EmPOWer featured six skill days bespoke to each participant, three one-to-one mentoring sessions, three 'How I Did It' sessions and two public-facing masterclasses. The programme also included online access to a 'strengths finder' diagnostic tool. Most participants were female, and were from a diverse range of communities in Birmingham. We note that there was no independent evaluator appointed to this £3m contract, or the Neighbourhood Producers programme specifically.

OPUS had run a 'Producing 102' Development Programme during 2021, supported by the Cultural Recovery Programme, which paved the way for continued development within a delivery context in the original proposal. The skills development programme wanted to bring new local voices forward and was considered essential due to gaps in city and regional capacity also keenly felt by Coventry during its year as UK City of Culture 2021. Neighbourhood Producers provided key local knowledge and were a bridge between the community and ODP. Within project delivery the Neighbourhood Producers' responsibilities included "Planning, coordinating and delivering a detailed schedule of activity in collaboration with ODP Festival Sites Team ...Managing a budget for site programming (£15k)... (Local) stakeholder management .. Organising local door drops ... Adhering to all Health and Safety Legislation and guidelines." (Project document)



Festival sites - images Amanda Roberts



FESTIVAL SITES' NEIGHBOURHOOD PRODUCERS: LEGACY AND LEARNING

"I'm still in love with art but how does the production and the practice come together?"

Neighbourhood Festival Sites Producer - Interview

In their post-project interviews, participants expressed improved clarity about their professional roles, e.g., as 'a project manager', 'a creative producer', 'a development producer'. Some concluded they had grown professionally from working with artists, rather than being an artist, and that the skills development they received had improved their confidence and helped them balance their existing roles with the work required to deliver their events.

Participants identified a wide range of new skills they had developed because of taking part in their Festival Sites project, and the supportive encouragement participants were able to draw upon. Comments highlighted the following skills acquired:

- "Skill to manage the artist, expectations, and negotiations"
- "Negotiation, facilitation, contracting, assertiveness."
- "Time management, creativity, communications, juggling moving parts, saying 'No!'"
- "Grew in confidence in networking, relationship development, better understanding of the arts and culture scene / structure."
- "Made me feel knowledgeable; a sense of belonging as somewhere I could be vulnerable"

There was additionally a keen sense conveyed by participants that they had been part of something very meaningful which had delivered tangible and positive outcomes for their communities, as captured by the quotes below:

- "We brought high quality art and cultural experiences to the residents of Yardley."
- "Hearing residents say how proud they are, seeing something like this in their area."
- "Bringing all the different cultural groups together."
- "Seeing members of the community of all ages and cultures coming together to enjoy."

One issue expressed in participant feedback was the large amount of administration work, which was felt to be "too much... too complex" alongside the practical requirements of the large-scale events and a lack of standardised digital tools or training to enable collaboration. Many participants found their key practical support in delivery came from stakeholders in local organisations - including some on steering groups and boards. While the OPUS team was singled out as providing 'moral support', advice and a 'sounding board' some participants expressed in interview the need for more pastoral care and a place to be/work together to support peer exchange. Several expressed that the 'process-driven' working required of them reached a point when they all 'hit the wall'.

They felt they would have benefited from:

- "Being shown procedures, tasks, processes, programming from the first instance such as contracts, Google docs, systems used or could have used"

- "Knowing exactly how much admin and work we were getting into before we got into it"
- "More outdoor event prep; tech schedule and event management"
- "A shared working space where more informal learning/ support could be accessed"

Additionally, producers suggested that more information on what new work would be available post-B2022 Festival would have been welcome.

The learning environment for the Neighbourhood Producers proved challenging against the fast-paced and often intensive demands surrounding the city centre sites. Everyone interviewed acknowledged they were at least 3 months adrift from the projects' original milestones, which may have limited the benefit for the cohort. It was suggested that more was needed from the OPUS Senior team to support, respond, and guide the producers as much as the programme itself, to enhance the learning/experience. Two of the producers were also based within local organisations and still working their regular 'day jobs', which added another layer of complexity for them to manage and negotiate. To further bolster emotional resilience/capacity building and delivery impact the group may have benefited from more consistent mentoring through the EmPOWer programme. The current scope allowed for 3 mentoring sessions delivered at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the process.

The producers were also largely annexed from the production process led by JA Productions and ODA which was felt beyond the capacity/experience of most in place. They would have

benefited from a supported knowledge of event management practices related to technical production. e.g. Inadequate site interpretation and signage, a basic 'what's on today' and clearer access support would have helped audiences navigate the site and programme and could have increased dwell times. Further work of this kind should look for learning within and between Community Connectors, who did not meet each other during the programme or receive any in/formal mentoring or training to better equip them for supporting a programme of this scale and longer-term impact for local communities.

Their actual producing experience may have benefited from a lead up 'arts engagement' budget to connect with residents/contributors in advance of the events, as involving producers in hyper local creative commissioning of new work is often the preserve of venue/festival leads. This would also have more deeply connected Neighbourhood Producers to their local artists and audiences, with OPUS noting surprise at how little connected the cohort was to the level of talent they had expected to source. It was noted that a better resourced and delegated marketing budgets/assets for Neighbourhood Producers to connect hyper locally may have also been an investment that would have unleashed the producers' networking and promotional activity/skills. (The B2022 Festival producer expressed concern that the programme was only confirmed six days before the start of the event, limiting promotional efforts/impact and learning experience).

All parties involved acknowledged that the Producers were not 'programmers', yet this proved to be the central plank of their role, and they would have benefited from more hands on and senior oversight to better shape each neighbourhood offer, and/or OPUS might have programmed other national/international work to gain more traction with local audiences and to widen the producers' insight and networks and attract more audiences.

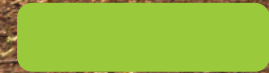


“I LOVED MAKING MUSIC IN THE FOREST”

PARTICIPANT - RESPONSE CARD

**“IT WAS FUN. WE HAD OUR OWN CREATIVITY;
WE CAN MAKE WHATEVER WE WANT TO”**

PARTICIPANT - RESPONSE CARD



CASE STUDY: FLOW (CHILDREN'S BIENNIAL)

Flow ([The Parakeet CIC](#)); 21st May - 20th August 2022: West Bromwich, Smethwick and Online

FLOW (CHILDREN'S BIENNIAL): NEED AND OPPORTUNITY

"The indigenous language of children is play."

Creative Director, The Parakeet CIC - Interview

B2022 Festival Producers shared in an interview that meaningful engagement with children and young people was key to fulfilling their programme remit in what is "the youngest city in Europe, mirroring the youth of the Commonwealth overall" (B2022 Commonwealth Games Highlights, DCMS, 2022). However, there were relatively few proposals for children and young people, and certainly, less that had a child led approach to develop or engage in creative activity. This was foregrounded by a venue proposed city festival for children and young people, which was thwarted by COVID. The Parakeet were originally commissioned to consider developing "a framework for aligned programming (for work for children and young people) ... work[ing] primarily with artists and cultural organisations from this region to shape and create the programme". However, through their research and some key provocations from regional voices, the recommendation for Flow was formed and The Parakeet were invited to lead this project.

Flow (Children's Biennial) would "create opportunities for artist development, new work, partnerships, skills sharing and capacity building". Flow would model what roles the creative sector might play in supporting children's development and learning. Flow's extended programme of activities explored how opportunities for open-ended play can be delivered in an anti-

racist, pro-environmental context through bold and imaginative arts programming.

The Parakeet CIC was commissioned to deliver the project. The Parakeet CIC draws on established and emerging artist-led models of non-hierarchical play environments that are non-prescriptive and non-gendered. These are outlined in depth on the [Children's Biennial](#) website.



Flow (Children's Biennial) - Image by Amanda Roberts

FLOW (CHILDREN'S BIENNIAL): PEOPLE AND PLACE

"The children were the participants, and the adults became their audience"

Senior Producer, B2022 Festival - Interview

Flow contributed to developing skills in creative play for practitioners - e.g., playworkers and volunteers - and importantly; parents/guardians and carers in the community. This offered opportunities for skills development to take place in a natural and unforced process;

"My son has sensory struggles / suspected ADHD / ASD so it was nice to see him being free"

Parent / Carer - Response Card

Flow events targeted practitioners including an online 'Pecha Kucha'⁴ programme and a free Continued Professional Development (CPD) day plus a two-day artist development session hosted by The Glue Collective for playworkers (including artists / producers), with an opportunity to apply learning to hands-on work on and with Glue's S:PARK installation in Shentley. As part of the project, 'micro-bursaries' went to support the development of eight emerging practitioners across the city region, not just in Birmingham, but also in Sandwell, Smethwick, Stourbridge, and Leamington Spa.

As well as their practitioner-focused skills development, Flow additionally ran a series of child-led creative activity-led programmes in the community, where families could drop in and engage with the ideas and practice of open-ended play.

⁴ PechaKucha is a storytelling format in which a presenter shows 20 slides for 20 seconds of commentary each

For example, Flow included a Children's Creative Studio which was held in the grounds of Sandwell's Bromwich Hall Museum across August 2022 - "and sometimes in the house too!" (Venue feedback). This proved to be a success both for the venue and for participating families.

"The staff were great and helped the children but stood back and only helped when needed"

Parents / Carer - Response Card

"What an amazing experience our children have had. It was so lovely to see how independent and individual all the children were."

Parent / Carer - Response Card



Glue Collective CPD - Images by Amy Campbell

FLOW (CHILDREN'S BIENNIAL): DESIGN AND DELIVERY

“Interesting to realise its adults that put the restrictions in place.”

Parent / Carer - Response Card

Flow's skills development programme featured an online segment, hands-on playworker coaching and practitioner bursaries. The online 'Pecha Kucha' - "Childhood Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" - was programmed to run over three evenings in August. Delivered in association with the Birmingham Education Partnership and curated by academic Andrea Davies, this programme looked at how research in health, education, geography, history, art and play work can be used and implemented in practice, especially by: "the general public including parents, teachers, and community leaders" (Eventbrite quote).

A free, two-day skills development session was hosted by The Glue Collective. This element of the programme explored professional and ethical frameworks to support artist-playworkers in ensuring play is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. An opportunity was provided to work on and with Glue's S:PARK installation. S:PARK is a creative space co-designed with local residents that supports artistic and playful participation for children and adults of all abilities (funded by a B2022 Festival 'Creative City grant'). It is 'populated' with a range of natural and upcycled materials - 'loose arts' - that offer children opportunities for self-directed creative play. It provided an illustrated learning resource to all attendees which was published online to support its legacy.

Build Your Own Arts Centre was co-led by Woodland Tribe and local children in Warley Woods in Smethwick, with children taking a lead to design, build and forge their own concept of such as space, each taking a lead on firing their imagination and fine motor skills to handle unfamiliar saws, hammers, and sustainable materials. The Creative Studio has been designed by children who were part of the Design Team, guided by the expertise of architectural practice MATT + FIONA and local designer-maker Lisa Lucy Gakunga. The children worked together over two days of half term to design the children's creative studio + gallery. This was staged in the grounds of Bromwich Hall Museum, Sandwell, alongside a wider invitation for children, parents, and their families to explore, play and find their own states of 'flow'.



Flow (Children's Biennial) - Image by Reuvie Love

FLOW (CHILDREN'S BIENNIAL): LEGACY AND LEARNING

I thought 'I'm not allowed to' but I guess I was."

Participant - Response Card

Flow had a clear commissioning remit, to create meaningful engagement for children and young people in a region with a relatively young population and located itself in Sandwell, West Bromwich and Smethwick as one of the most culturally deprived parts of the region. It did this successfully while maintaining an uncompromising focus on the development and promotion of skills and practice in non-hierarchical, non-prescriptive play. The models and exemplars Flow had adopted were clearly articulated and consistent throughout with the integrated capacity building for the sector, and with building appetite for children and parents to take part and shape the outcomes.

"Creative engagement should enable them to: make decisions, take risks, and solve problems on their own terms."

The Parakeet

Flow's public programme supported the local authority's commitment to build communities where families have high aspirations matched by the need to address equality of opportunity, adaptability, and resilience. Evaluation by Bromwich Hall found that most visitors were drawn from local communities - which are some of the region's most deprived - with over 60% coming from a three-mile radius. "We had a lot of new visitors who had not visited us before. Many families came back repeatedly [over the three weeks]."

The Flow team were described as "organised and competent; good communicators, able to deliver a safe environment and a great programme of activities." Activities additionally played to the strengths of the venue.

"Our site was perfect for this ...I hope that one legacy of the festival will be new audiences using this fantastic resource in the future and looking out for what else we have on site.... We learnt a lot ourselves from the programme and ... we would love something like this to happen again at Bromwich Hall."

Venue feedback

The venue reported "really good numbers" for the summer holiday programme. While this might be explained by a lack of alternative provision due to post-Pandemic socio-economic issues, participants were described as staying "for many hours", with a high level of intensity of engagement. However, had The Parakeet CIC had a lead up budget to engage the local area before the intensive residency, they would have undoubtedly connected with an even greater number, and/or more importantly, met a greater level of need in those participating/attending.

Audience response cards and interviews with parents and carers made it clear that they understood they were taking part in non-hierarchical, non-prescriptive play activities... "Interesting to realise its adults that put the restrictions in place."

There is however no indication that they would continue to use these skills themselves, outside of the context of a supported environment, especially since children's responses were often focused on the unusual licence they were experiencing. This would require follow-up evaluation to determine.

[I liked] "the hammering and that no-one was telling you what to do"

Participant - Response Card

"We had the freedom to do anything, and use saw and hammers unlike we usually do"

Participant - Response Card

Flow's approach directly values children's voices, their creativity and right to imaginative child led play. It uniquely enabled children with a wide range of interest, skill, and ability to engage equitably, with the parents also taking learning from their children's play. Each contract with an artist or partner within the biennial, was bound by a set of guiding principles that lay ethos and values at the heart of any exchange with children and their supporting adults. Likewise, Flow's mixed engagement model - including paid holiday club participants, after school provision, forest school and formal education including academic partners - demonstrate that there is a wider ecology through which to secure resources to sustain this work. The project was originally conceived as a £250K project, but had to be scaled back to £100K due to fundraising. This resulted in a missed opportunity for The Parakeet CIC to undertake lead up engagement work across summer 2022 in areas of deprivation.

This would have ensured families were more directly connected to summer holiday activities - though future iterations can also call upon the wealth of practitioners, artists and playworkers who undertook rich investment in their professional development.

The wider commissioning framework and collaborations within the B2022 Festival programme will have lots to learn from Flow's environmental ethos, a working sustainable practice and green procurement approach, including the sharing of sustainable materials with SPECTRA's Abundance project at the Birmingham City Hospital. One aspect less successful in this model was the full engagement of its steering group including Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP), which the Creative Director cites as time / capacity rather than will, with key stakeholders therefore well placed to build towards successive biennials. BEP did not directly engage in the delivery of this project (nor take the opportunity for its staff to shadow/observe themselves). However, they should be a primary partner to look at ways to disseminate its learning and good practice (locally and nationally), and we would encourage them to continue to identify ways to nurture The Parakeet CIC and resources to sustain a Children's Biennial of this quality in terms of the scope of imaginative outdoor play, and impact on professional development.

As part of Flow's legacy programme, eight 'micro-bursaries' of £500 were awarded through an open call to "provide seed funding for ... self-determined professional development activities]" (project website).

Bursaries were for developing skills and practice in fields including play and grief, garden spaces, loose parts play, mark making; music; messy play; and use of audio-visual equipment, all ideas primed to be factored into future themes in the next Biennial. If resourced to a high level, combined with the burgeoning 'Green Space' networks in a proposed 'City of Nature', The Parakeet CIC has a solid foundation to evolve and sustain this vital work.

Surprising partnerships have been forged such as Sandwell Museums & Libraries (rather than Culture & Sports), which could pave the way for wider research opportunities and further creative cross pollination for arts, reading and literacy development. Its greatest impact is developing the skills of over 1200 families, raising aspirations, and giving children great experiences and opportunities, situated in one of most deprived neighbourhoods in the Black Country.



CASE STUDY: BESPOKE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Convene, Challenge, Connect ([Culture Central](#)) July to October 2022

Diversity In Leadership (Strawberry Words) September to October 2022

BESPOKE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: NEED AND OPPORTUNITY

One of B2022 Festival's key objectives was to make skills training and support accessible to marginalised, emerging and diverse artists and producers, representative of the region's diverse communities. Some of these organisations and individuals would be delivering work as part of B2022 Festival and would be working at a mid to large scale for the first time. Three programmes were developed to support them:

- The EmPOWer programme, which supported Festival Sites Neighbourhood Producers' skills development during their delivery of the neighbourhood festival sites, which was intended to develop the skills and engagement in the industry for diverse producers (within the sector or encouraging those with transferable skills to the sector). EmPOWer is addressed above in the Festival Sites case study.
- Convene, Challenge, Connect which was a three-strand programme delivered by Culture Central ([culturecentral.co.uk](#)) and "co-created with the region's arts, cultural, heritage and community sector." Convene, Challenge, Connect is addressed below.

- Diversity in Leadership which was delivered by [Strawberry Words](#). This programme was for culturally diverse arts organisations located in the region who were in receipt of Arts Council England (ACE) Elevate funding. Diversity in Leadership is addressed below.

CONVENE: WEBINAR & Q&A SESSIONS with Namywa from Girl Grind UK. Image by Culture Central.

CONVENE: WEBINAR & Q&A SESSIONS with Caroline Davis from Opus. Image by Culture Central.



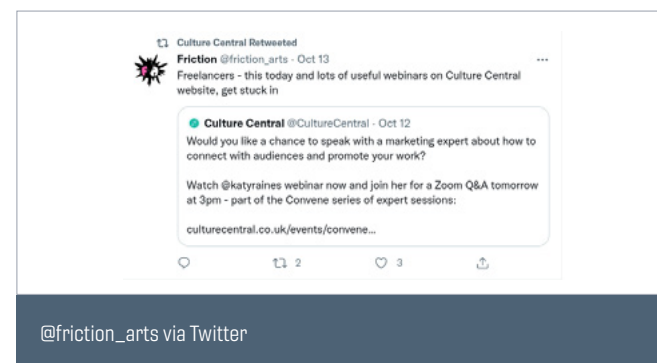
BESPOKE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: PEOPLE AND PLACE

Regionally based artists, organisations and community groups were supported through two of the Convene, Challenge, Connect strands; Convene and Challenge.

- Convene was accessible to all participants, as well as open for anyone to access via Culture Central's website.
- Challenge participants were reached and engaged via four, full-day public workshops at venues around the region. Two of these workshops were held in Birmingham; the others reached participants across the region; one being delivered in Wolverhampton and another in Stratford-upon-Avon. Transport was provided from Birmingham city centre.
- Additionally, freelancers could apply for a third strand of bespoke development opportunities; Connect; encompassing three mentoring sessions, a social gathering, and a bursary of £500 to support attendance at Challenge and Convene events; plus, eight independent Connect networks known by and/or affiliated to Culture Central were awarded £2000 each to resource network led action.

In addition to their engagement in the Convene, Challenge, Connect strand, leaders and teams from Arts Council England's Elevate - funded organisations in the West Midlands were also offered a bespoke and programme called 'Diversity in Leadership'. Elevate's focus was "to give tailored support on how they might transition effectively into nationally resilient diverse led organisations" with the additional B2022 Festival brief designed to be complementary, providing crucial transitional mentoring support for those who applied to be part of its National Portfolio of Organisations (3-year funding).

Organisations on the programme were Coventry-based EGO Theatre, a learning disability-focused performance company; Selina Thompson Ltd, an interdisciplinary performance company; Simmer Down Arts, who produce an annual music festival; Humanhood, an international dance company; the Emma Press, an independent publisher and Soul City Arts (see Untold Stories Report). Birmingham based visual arts organisation MAIA Creatives was approached to be included in this cohort but declined.



BESPOKE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Diversity in Leadership was a development programme tailored to the needs of leaders and teams from ACE's Elevate-funded organisations in the West Midlands. Strawberry Words shaped the training programme through one-to-one meetings with each organisation in August. The Diversity in Leadership programme included up to £7k of unrestricted bespoke support and subsidised membership of two relevant professional organisations for two years.

Skills development sessions included governance, finance, and fundraising, scaling up and sustainability and policy writing support. Policies covered included those required by Arts Council England for National Portfolio Organisation status, potential inclusion of which was a focus of the programme. Sessions were led by expert consultants including Sarah Gee and Helga Henry, held at Midland Arts Centre Birmingham. Each organisation was additionally allocated resources to support two mentoring sessions with a consultant of their choosing to address the impact that joining ACE's National Portfolio might have on their organisation - these will take place outside of the programme delivery timeframe led by Strawberry Words.

The Convene, Challenge, Connect programme was shaped by Culture Central in collaboration with the B2022 Festival team using its diverse informal associated networks as a research base to inform its content.

"I'm here to talk to you about creating a culture around your creativity, securing the bag and basically how to build a network"

NAMYWA - Culture Central Programme Resource Video

Convene was delivered via a programme of webinars, presentations, and Q&As. At the time of writing, videos of these sessions are available on Culture Central's website, in some cases with additional downloadable resources. Topics were designed to address themes previously identified as areas of need within the sector / region through prior research, including:

- Marketing - including making and sharing digital content,
- Finance - including advice on bid writing, setting charging and pricing structures and alternative revenue streams,
- Monitoring and Evaluating - including demonstrating social value and logic models,
- Business Development - including company structures, HR, law, contracts, and best practice.

Challenge was a programme of four full-day public workshops. Morning sessions featured speakers and 'provocations' which were streamed online, and topics included partnerships, audiences, placemaking and people.

Connect was two-fold:

- Firstly, an application-only freelancer development bursary, targeting diverse and marginalised practitioners across culture, heritage, and voluntary sectors. The programme included mentor matchmaking with three, one-hour mentoring sessions, a £500 bursary, a year's Culture Central membership. Note, a 'freelancer' could refer to a sole trader and/or person who held multiple contracts/roles including those existing within other SMEs in the region.
- Secondly, the Connect Networks associated with Culture Central, and included LGBTQ+, class, heritage, disability, neurodiversity and regionality - 'connect' networks/hubs included those led by Friction Arts, Centrala, the Birmingham Hippodrome (for diverse artists), Coventry & Warwickshire freelancers' group and Deaf Explorer. They were offered £2k to support member-led activity which ranged from a public-facing More Than a Moment event (regional diversity) to a development series to shape the long-term strategy for d/Deaf artists in the region.

BESPOKE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: LEGACY AND LEARNING

The Diversity in Leadership tender was awarded in April 2022, but delay in contracting meant that the programme itself did not start until July 2022. Participating organisations told us this had a practical impact on their take-up of training & potential attendance to the wider Challenge sessions led by Culture Central, but all participants reported that the programme had positively impacted their organisation. If a longer lead time had been available, more would have attended - including Chair / Trustees / Volunteers, and enhanced reflection time between sessions might have contributed to a more significant impact on governance and leadership in participating organisations.

The £7k of unrestricted bespoke support awarded as part of the Diversity in Leadership programme was welcomed by every organisation. Participants used it towards production, administration, training, and support benefiting both senior management and wider teams, specialist advice and expertise into business plans and to complete the Arts Council England National Portfolio applications. For example, Humanhood were able to access specialist tax and international legal assistance around business practice and touring. EGO bought a pro-CRM system and implemented organisation-wide training and systems development. Apart from the Emma Press, all others participating in the programme made applications to the Arts Council England National Portfolio. All organisations on the programme were successful in their appointment as National Portfolio Organisations. This stability shift for key organisations will have a significant impact on the creative and touring ecology in the UK and beyond, increasing opportunities for sustained audience building for diverse communities. Most of these

entrants also hold international outlooks and global markets for their work, which can open wider legacies and points of network building and exchange for the Commonwealth communities engaged. Likewise, this offers rich potential for burgeoning new business models for diverse led organisations, with the potential for the independent sector to create different approaches to investment, paving the way for a stronger reflective regional identity. Indeed, it is vital that these companies are given fair opportunities to contribute to and benefit from the commissioning and legacy plans.

“Our eternal struggle is around capacity, particularly as a disabled-led organisation with the majority of team members affected by disability and/or chronic illness. It might be useful for the senior team members to receive people-management training.”

“Capacity building - more creatives to aid the AD and more administrative and marketing support for ED. - there is only so much such a small team can implement/ deliver, and we do not yet have the capacity to go in-depth in both these areas.”

Participants - Interviews

Soul City Arts used the Diversity in Leadership award to enable the Director to work fully on delivering Waswasa as part of B2022 Festival (see Untold Stories case study report) while the company deepened its “internal systems, company capacity and infrastructure ... consolidated administrative processes and protocols”. Their Executive Director reported the process would help keep the company at “the heart of the community ... with potential for growth and capital ambitions”. A Festival Producer working closely with the company said the skills development process has given Soul City Arts “more clout to ask for things [from partners, e.g.] box office, front of house” going forward. At a time of duress for the cultural sector, these are vital capacity and capability building outcomes.

Convene, Challenge, Connect was an ambitious programme which made meaningful skills development available to a broad spectrum of community-based organisations and artists. The hybrid learning model - open-access online; in-person workshops and freelancer-only prolonged engagement - ensured that a stepped and differentiated offer was in place to address themes previously identified as areas of need within the region. Culture Central have retained their resources online - in some instances enhancing them - to enable further learning and development to continue after the conclusion of B2022 Festival programme including ways to increase their accessibility. These digital assets are only beneficial if connected with a strong engagement and communication plan, overcoming the perception of Culture Central as a membership organisation (for some on this programme, those members seen as 'gatekeepers') and an increased connectivity to freelance networks outside of mainstream culture.

The Connect freelancer development strand is notable because of its practical focus. It enabled emerging and early-career artists and organisations to learn from practice leaders in the region, with an emphasis on mentoring and problem solving, introducing participants to a wider professional network, and backing that with a year's membership of Culture Central.

Only seven of the 34 bursary participants were available to sample. Whilst they all welcomed this type of programme continuing and widening its reach to artists who are not connected to the mainstream arena, some similar issues arose: they questioned the relevance of the Challenge Days programme to a freelancer, and instead would have valued time and effort being directed towards making direct introductions to perceived 'gatekeepers, movers and shakers'. Participants also recognise the importance and value of 'peer to peer' connectivity, especially after the pandemic. Culture Central may have benefited from more administrative capacity to support the level of organisational and pastoral work involved.

In turn Culture Central might have considered utilising external specialist advice/input in the selection and brokerage of mentor relationships, with some feeling that the low fee applicable to this mentoring role affected who might have applied/been secured (£50 per hour), particularly regarding attracting mentors beyond a regional pool.

Bursary participants were awarded £500 to engage with the sector development programme. This bursary award does not seem sufficient to meet the time commitment this programme required nor to maximise the opportunities to take additional time out to focus on building a sustainable future. Communication between Cultural Central and participants on the programme could have benefited from further clarity: that the bursary fee was a contribution to the individual's time and that there was additional access support available for participants wishing to attend the Challenge conference days. Future iterations might reconsider this and consider increasing participants' bursaries to enable more benefits to arise from their fullest participation in the programme. This could support, for example, access and travel costs to enable additional networking; buying time to research a new project/partners; time to secure other income; and a longer mentoring period to activate supported change etc.

With such diversity at play in the cohort, future iterations might consider how access is applied, a delegated allocation could be used to enable and empower the person with a disability to choose how to apply it and maximise their own learning/engagement. From experience, some may often lack confidence or self-management to request and administer such provision, and not engage as a result. Culture Central's hybrid model was welcomed, but to maximise benefit, more consideration should be given to its digital strategy for engagement e.g., who will naturally find the Convene resources unless via Culture Central website or newsletter subscription.

Indeed, how can Culture Central broaden and build its regional associations to ensure future iterations reach the widest geographical and freelancer need.

More broadly, the Culture Central team chose to source organisations from within the region to deliver freelancer support networks, yet this might fall short of freelancers' potential/demand or expectations to work within a national and international context.

Indeed, it may have been a missed opportunity to not consider wider sector partnerships to enrich this programme and support for independent freelance agents. For example, this could include advocacy for wider memberships such as the Musicians Union, Artist News, Mothers Who Make, Independent Theatre Council and joint sector collaboration including regionally the "P" Word enterprise programme (Black-led businesses run by the Centre for Research into Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship - CREME), or nationally Migrants in Theatre movement or Freelance Futures. Indeed, future iterations might consider an artform and/or sector focus, linked to wider regional/national skills, vocational training or leadership development priorities and funds etc.



If it remains aligned and embedded in the B2022 Commonwealth Games Legacy document⁵ it should caveat the already significant investment that has been made in outdoor arts/ events and dance (through sustained and substantial investment in platforms such as Birmingham International Dance Festival), and perhaps build on the strength of this programme, by focusing on more diverse and marginalised voices attracted to this year's cohort e.g. working class, LGBTQ, D/deaf and disabled artists or those with long term health conditions.

This region also has a depth of freelance employment in participatory arts feeding both schools and community practice, and the loss of Arts Council England Bridge organisations Arts Connect (West Midlands) & Mighty Creatives (East Midlands), will have an impact on sustained CPD opportunities as well as a shrinking the marketplace which will needs to be considered.

The Life Mapping sessions led by Friction Arts were overwhelmingly considered positive, one quoting "life mapping was a revolution." The key to their success was structured time to pause and reflect. This process raised time sensitive and, in some cases, traumatic issues for many. The sessions were held by Friction Arts' Wellbeing Practitioner and their venue is recognised as a safe space. Yet the delay to the mentoring process for some participants may have left them a little adrift. Consistent 'care' that was so keenly felt beneficial from time spent with Friction, could be further embedded into Cultural Central's delivery of the Connect strand.

The Critical Friend brief was originally intended to offer a more holistic relationship to the programme and appropriate challenge including to the core delivery team, yet this shifted with the appointment of independent artist RELOAD, who responded to a creative brief around conditions for freelance success. This speaks to the wider consideration for Culture Central to consider how to broaden its membership model to better include, represent and reflect the needs of freelancers going forward.

5 <https://www.birmingham2022.com/about-us/our-purpose/our-legacy>



“I JUST LIKE MAKING THE GIFTS BECAUSE THERE’S DIFFERENT RACES AND CULTURES... THEN PUTTING LOVE INTO THE NOTE WHAT YOU PUT ON THERE FOR THE ATHLETES”

PARTICIPANT - INTERVIEW



4600 Gifts - Image by Hayley Slater

CONCLUSION

Our focus in researching this report was to address the short-term outcomes of the Theory of Change underpinning the wider B2022 Festival evaluation by identifying and closely examining commissions that offered opportunities for skills development.

This report has carefully gathered and presented evidence of skills development reported by participants, including those involved in the B2022 Festival's co-creation activities. Our evidence is presented in the form of case studies which draw out the lived experience of the participants, audiences, artists, and project teams who were engaged with the commissions - as well as pinpointing specific highlights of good practice, and what lessons can be learned for similar activities in the future.

Most of the commissions we researched for this report had a focus on providing opportunities for artists to collaborate and develop new skills, fulfilling B2022 Festival's principle of delivery to 'transform'. They also - to some extent - aligned with the 'Present Moment' curatorial line by supporting and foregrounding emerging, contemporary practice, although the opportunity for many to connect to a national or global operational context was limited. Most commissions had a substantial element of interactivity or 'public activation' and learning through doing. However, the significant delay in the two sector development contracts resulted in many projects not being able to engage with the programme, as they could not allocate time to address organisational change whilst at the point of 'peak delivery' for their project. Although the commissions researched presented a broad range of artforms and diverse development models, several common themes, approaches, and structures were apparent in how they

successfully addressed the short-term objectives of offering opportunities for skills development. These approaches included:

1. **Commissions where participants developed or relearned creative skills in a practical, real-world context.** This addressed the outcome requirement to demonstrate the value of arts and cultural activities and the principles of delivery to provide opportunities for artists to collaborate and develop new skills.

For example, Congregation (Creating Dangerously) addressed the decline in creative cultural skills such as growing and cooking through the provision of collective space and skilled enablers. Flow (Children's Biennale)'s extended programme of activities explored how skills development for supporting open-ended play could be delivered to professionals, parents, and carers benefiting the 'family unit.' 4600 Gifts workshops enabled participants to 'work alone, together', learning new skills and building new networks while they crafted gifts which all had a specific purpose.

2. **Programmes which supported the professional practice of emerging artists, and artists embedded in the local community, to deliver against specific objectives.** These addressed B2022 Festival's principles of delivery to be distinctive, diverse and provide opportunities for artists to collaborate and develop new skills.

For example, EmPOWer - which supported Festival Sites Neighbourhood Producers' skills development during their delivery of the neighbourhood festival sites - was able to directly assist neighbourhood producers with a programme that was tailored to their specific needs, working closely with delivery partners. Also, as part of Diversity in Leadership participating organisations were given additional assistance to support their strategic development, including future applications to major funding opportunities such as Arts Council England's National Portfolio Programme.

3. **Programmes which offered bursaries, bespoke mentoring opportunities or other elements which participants could self-direct based on their own specific needs.** These addressed B2022 Festival's principles of delivery to be distinctive and diverse, and the mission pillar requirement to foreground partnerships and projects that would connect diverse artists.

For example, Connect, Culture Central's application-only freelancer development strand, offered a £500 bursary and a year's subscription to the organisation. Diversity in Leadership offered a £7k bursary and subsidised membership of two relevant professional organisations for two years. Flow (Children's Biennial) offered eight 'micro-bursaries' of £500 each. Participants revealed in post-programme interviews the diverse needs to which they had allocated these resources; and the positive impacts those investments in time and money were already having on their practice.

WHAT WORKED

B2022 Festival gave significant commissions to independent and artist-led projects which enabled them to direct major projects which brought a greater diversity of local artists, collaborators, and participants together - hyper locally, locally, inter-regionally. Each of the case studies included in this report held ethical frameworks around care, integrity and inclusion that were carefully applied, which created the conditions for risk taking and learning to be taken. Bold investment in independent artist producers (like Tappin In' from Stephanie Ridings & Lou Lomas) and fledgling companies (like The Parakeet CIC) provided significant opportunity for upscaling and re-positioning within the sector boosting opportunities for future investment. This also created productive impacts in terms of 'on the job' learning to also support pathways to different roles and employment opportunities, widening access and entry points across the sector, and valuing embedded community expertise around building creative and social assets.

The projects' ability to reclaim spaces in a way that struck a great balance between provocation and participation enabled new ways for artists to make work, and for audiences to engage in the making and presentation of new work in a scale and cross artform way that has not been seen in the city region before. Many used the B2022 Commonwealth Games as a positive framework locating strong high-quality invitations, 'meeting people where they were' and this socially engaged approach was a multiplier in terms of the skills and development opportunities employed.

Success factors indicative of the wider B2022 Commonwealth Games' mission pillar of 'Bringing People Together' included mass participation opportunities; open-ended play; meaningful and collaborative engagement with target audiences; the development of emerging practitioners; and scale. Investment enabled creative and cultural practitioners to scale-up and practically scaffold their organisations and partnership range, resulting in significant systems and organisational change - some even developed from artist to project (e.g., Neighbourhood Producers to independent SMEs, Craftspace has inspired new emerging collectives) and from project to organisation e.g. all Elevate funded organisations which applied secured Arts Council England National Portfolio Status and The Parakeet CIC - a fledgling CIC - established the first Children's Biennial in the UK, one of a handful worldwide.

"The legacy is the value (of engagement) that is promoted. It encourages cognitive, behavioural, and emotional change that helps grapple with issues of injustice, perceptions of cultural production and inclusive practice. The legacy of skills development is using artistic intervention as a social tool."

Senior Producer - Interview

Evaluative insights point to value-led commissioning work improving the relationship between sector and producers. It is also about influencing change from grassroots level, which is

reflective of the first principle of change – namely the need to understand what is trying to be fixed. The implication of skills development was reflexive learning, which all participants were engaged in either cognitively or practically. How can we sustain that cycle of reflection in the legacy period to maximise return on investment made?

Festival Sites' Neighbourhood Producers described their biggest achievement as being able to facilitate larger scale cultural experiences to local residents whom they identify themselves with; giving local artists, musicians, and producers a platform; and an increased understanding of project management (e.g., practical skills like workflow for planning and delivery). We Are Birmingham (Birmingham Museums Trust and We Don't Settle) gave artists and their work visibility - the exposure they need to represent their communities - coming 'from' the people to enact institutional change. B2022 Festival's commissions have created a collaborative working environment in which producers were able to bounce off the skillset around them, and in many examples, the role of the B2022 Festival Producers or Lead Producer to each commission / project was crucial to support learning environments and CPD culture (e.g., Focused investment in Birmingham Music Archive as a future heritage sector leader.) It has provided volunteers, participants, and community organisations a sense of belonging - for example - 4600 Gifts' Dosti Group - many of the women felt proud to represent the Commonwealth in such a way through their craft making abilities.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

Delivering everything within this festival period (March - September 2022) has proved challenging for commissions, heightened by the realities of Pandemic recovery, but particularly the sector development programme referenced here, with contractual delays compounding the short window and increased risk placed upon productive delivery and sustained engagement.

Moving forwards, cultural funders and partners should consider opportunities to harness this investment in skills and find opportunities to further track/temperature check those developed in 6, 12 and 24-months' time. Equally, a commitment to sharing practice (success and failures) will also help support the evolving skills ecology; as will exploring ways to continue the facilitation of key networks (that where possible should remain porous to new entrants), as peer to peer collective reflection has longer term potential to diversify and retain skills and transform the regional sector.

LOOKING FORWARD

As you might expect from such a diversity of projects and commissions, there are a wide range of future focused insights, and recommendations from lessons learned (both big and small) that flow from our analysis in this case study. They have relevance for ongoing legacy planning, and more widely for practitioners, and commissioners of large-scale events such as Birmingham 2022 Festival.

These insights and recommendations include the following:

1. **Major world events can provide one-off opportunities for sectors to scale up, but the learning and development environment needs to have appropriate levels of resource and resilience to hold this space prioritising wellbeing and building long term resilience for those involved.** More consideration around timeframes for 'training' and 'doing' with time for testing and reflection should be built into development programmes, with increased mentorship resourced at the right levels to embrace national and international mentors to increase impact and value.
2. **Recognise that the successful scale of 'on the job' learning potential needs to be considered across other parts of the creative sector** - not everyone wants to scale up or work in outdoors / place-based arts which has already received significant investment - and should respond to a clearer regional and / or national skills and cultural leadership strategy for the West Midlands; how can major events address a regional skills shortage but also be connected to other vocational pathways in place to place the sector as a viable career choice?
3. **The B2022 Festival commissions underline the importance of taking 'risks'** with organisations and individuals who may have less track-record of delivery, but who do have clear potential.
4. **Consider a robust skills audit** to look to streamline long term sector resilience and align cross sector investment partners.
5. **Consider longer term investment needed in back-end roles:** production, stage management, supply chains, digital media, and access. For example, Deaf Explorer might have been invested in to grow a wider bank of BSL Interpreters, Inclusion Assistants etc who could support and understand the needs for artists and creative projects - this includes more scope for collaborative interpretation in creative work such as Tappin' In (as co-host with Kit Green) or Come Bowl With Me (the BSL Interpreter was part of the ensemble). Locating a Senior Access and Inclusion Producer within the commissioning team may also help ensure that all commissioning budgets, contract, and resource negotiations are at the appropriate levels to ensure access is sustained throughout a project / programme lifecycle to secure inclusion.



6. **Develop long term regional perspective on how to address key priorities and opportunities for individual and organisational growth** in ways that can really strengthen the whole regional creative ecology. For example, The Parakeet CIC has potential to be an international leader in terms of how to meet inequality in children's and young peoples' provision in most deprived locales. How can they best be supported in the future? Craftspace's 'audit process' during their mass engagement has identified clear diverse talent with leadership potential along with appetites from emerging and amateur makers to diversify their interest in other craft forms and increase their own skills levels. How can these opportunities be built upon? Grand Union holds a clear leadership role to address food poverty, community cohesion and meeting climate justice, but its impact will remain limited without an increase in core resources and the resources to support cross sector expertise within the organisation.

There is a need to reflect on the lessons around embedding 'climate change' / climate crisis' lenses into a major festival programme of this kind. B2022 Commonwealth Games originally set a target as the first Commonwealth Games with a carbon-neutral legacy⁶ - locally tagged as the 'Green Games' - which was downgraded to 'striving towards' during B2022 Festival itself.

However, given this commitment, it seems a significant omission from all the bespoke sector development programmes along with the wider commissioned programme that there was no reference to environment, sustainability or climate change, and more emphasis should have been given to invest in sustainable production, practice, and ways to meet the climate challenge ahead.

Whilst a sustainability supplier (Julie's Bicycle) was appointed to offer (free of charge) training, sustainability thinking, practice and reporting for organisations, and they were expected to monitor as much carbon impact as possible for their projects. However, the programme launched later than expected (Summer 2022) due to contractual and timescale delays. These severely hindered efforts to promote and communicate the programme to projects and organisations, and due to delivery pressures, for them to engage in the programme fully.

B2022 Festival might have provided a clearer environmental standard in their commissioning guidelines, which would have sparked demand for bespoke training and/or resource, supplier, and knowledge sharing. However, some exemplar environmental standards have been set through projects such as FLOW (Children's Biennial), Congregation (Creating Dangerously) and 4600 Gifts which can be shared in the legacy period for wider review. Indeed, if Culture Central is to sustain its place in championing the independent freelancer sector (often the most impacted by the climate crisis), it is vital that sustainable practice and ways to engender individual and collective systems change to meet climate justice challenges is central.

In the words of a bursary participant "we need to survive before we thrive."

Feed the network:

Many of those delivering across these Case Studies were organisations at a point of significant growth and change themselves, which along with the impact of the pandemic on those returning to work, created a challenging environment for them to scale up, and it is great testament to those organisations that they managed these challenges productively. Key going forward, is the consistent communication and widening of reach to meet the very apparent freelancer and independent sector's need to find more work; to seek and connect with opportunities that are fair, simple, and transparent; and to build self-sustaining networks in person avoiding an over reliance on online interaction. Key stakeholders need to consider how they retain a 'safe space' to hold the talent in our diverse communities that are "on a cliff edge" or "only getting work during Black History Month." (Bursary Participant).

There has been a significant step change in reaching a greater diversity and scale of artists (emerging and established) and participants/volunteers with an access, disability or wellbeing need identified. B2022 Festival provided an Access Scheme and Wellbeing Support scheme. However information communicated from B2022 producers to their contacts in projects sometimes didn't reach producers on the ground, some of whom expressed symptoms of physical, emotional, and mental stress.

⁶ <https://www.birmingham2022.com/about-us/our-purpose/our-legacy/sustainability/>

Fashioning a more comprehensive sector skills development approach:

With the benefit of hindsight, the B2022 Festival might have done more in terms of wider sector skills development to improve the legacy across the creative industries including production and event management training; digital capacity building and digital skills development; plus, brokerage to the digital, media and film sector (voluntary to commercial) to widen the available pool and connectivity possible for legacy collaborations with the arts. Although this was manifested elsewhere in the Organising Committee activities, it could have been much more closely aligned to B2022 Festival to increase engagement, community cohesion and audience development across sports and arts.

There might have also been further potential for participants, project volunteers to have taken on more meaningful roles in documentation, promotion, and advocacy and in turn to have had some social media/digital training to help the widen audience potential for the arts. With hindsight, further work could have been conducted with central B2022 Commonwealth Games Volunteers - who staffed the Festival Sites - enabling them to be future arts advocates.

Whilst B2022 Festival did maximise the effectiveness of individual projects through targeted skills development support, it could also implement learnings from these case studies on a macro level. Some of the case study accounts demonstrate just how this powerful development of skills across such 'interconnected networks' can take place. To further the success of skills development, we should be able to conceive of the whole ecology of artists, creative practitioners, communities, volunteers, and participants involved as an interconnected network, in which the experience and skills of one group can impact powerfully on the skills development and agency of all the others. We hope the insights and lessons noted in this conclusion can ensure that happens more and more in future commissioning activity of this kind.



APPENDIX

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS (A-Z)

Anawim, Arts Council England, B:Music Symphony Hall, BBC Sounds, Beatfreaks, Birmingham Hippodrome, Birmingham International Dance Festival, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Birmingham Music Archive, Birmingham Quakers Meeting House, Birmingham Settlement, Black Country Freelancers, Cannock Chase Leisure Centre, Compass Support Services, Coventry Canal Basin, Craftspace, Creative City Grants, Crisis, Culture Central, Curiosity Production, DanceXchange, Deaf Explorer, Earthen Lamp, EGO Performance Company Ltd, Elevate, Empower, EMPower, Fatt Projects, Fenton Town Hall (Stoke), Friction Arts, GirlGrind UK, Go Woman! Alliance CIC, GRAEAE, Grand Union, Humanhood, Indigo-Ltd, Ironbridge Town Events, MAIA, MATT+FIONA, Modern Clay, More Than A Moment, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Oasis Community Hub Hobmoor, OPUS, Rugby Art Gallery, Scrapstore, Seedbeds, Selina Thompson Ltd, Sense Touchbase Pears, Shambala Festival, Sifa Fireside, Simmerdown, SIPS Sandwell, Soul City Arts, Spring Housing Association, St Anne's Hostel, Stephen Gaskets, Strawberry Words, Talking Birds, The Cloud Cuckoo Land Collective, The Core Theatre, The Emma Press, The Parakeet, The Patrick Trust, The Springfield Project, UB40, Unity Hub, Warley Woods Community Trust, Warley Woods People Park, Wild Lives Forest School, Woodland Tribe, Xhosa Cole Quartet.

PARTICIPATING INDIVIDUALS (A-Z)

Amy Dalton-Hary, Amy Martin, Andrew Fowles, Andy Brown, Anji Barker, Bambi, Bobby Friction, Carl Phillips, Carol Pemberton, Carolyn Morton, Channi Dorset, Cherry Pickles, Chloe Deakin, Chris Sudworth, Claire Birch, Clare Harnett-Man, Dapz on the Map, Dave Twist, Dee Manning, Deidre Figueiredo, Derek Nisbet, Dr. Vishalakshi Roy, Dwayne Hardball, Elizabeth Lawal, Elle Chante, Erica Love, Friendly Fire, Gilly G, Hassan Hussain, Helga Henry, Hira Butt, Holly Hollister, Jack James, Jenny Peevers, Jenny Sealy MBE, Jenny Smith, Jez Collins, Jo Capper, John Mostyn, Joy Scott-Thompson, Kalandra McFarquhar, Kate Luxmoore, Kim McAleese, Kirsty Clarke, Lateesha Johnson, Laura Grigg, Laura Nyahuye, Lekan Babalola, Lou Lomas, Mahawa Keita, Martin Green, Martin Holcombe, Matt Cox, MC Magika, Mo Jones aka Mistress Mo, Mohammed Ali, Mykal Brown, Namywa, Omar Hanif, Parv Kaur, Pottinger & Cole, Rachel Chui, Rachel Vargas, Rajpal Pardesi, Rashta Butt, Reload, Robin Campbell, Rodger Rinkwell, Sanity, Sarah Gee, Sarah Robins, Satnam Rana, Simon Duggal, Siphon Ndlovu, Sophina Jagot, Soweto Kinch, Steph Tyrrell, Stephanie Ridings, Stephen Pennel, Sylvia Chan, Tamara-Jade Kaz, Tinisha Williams, TJ Rehmi, Toyah Willcox, We Are Muffy.



Author: Indigo-Ltd / Punch Records
Graphic Design: Culture Counts

Registered address:

Birmingham Organising Committee for the 2022 Commonwealth
Games Ltd, One Brindley Place, Birmingham, B1 2JB | 0121 303 5422

Company number: 11120160 | VAT number: GB289809239

