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**Contested cultures of care: research with  
and for the plus one community on the  
plus one experience - evaluation report**

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Authors	Dodsley, Thomas; Manning-Jones, Alix; Nunn, Alex; Bowers-Brown, Tamsin; Benaton, Tonimarie; Murden, Jade
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# CONTESTED CULTURES OF CARE:

Research with and for the  
Plus One Community on  
the Plus One Experience

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## Evaluation report

Alex Nunn

Tamsin Bowers-Brown

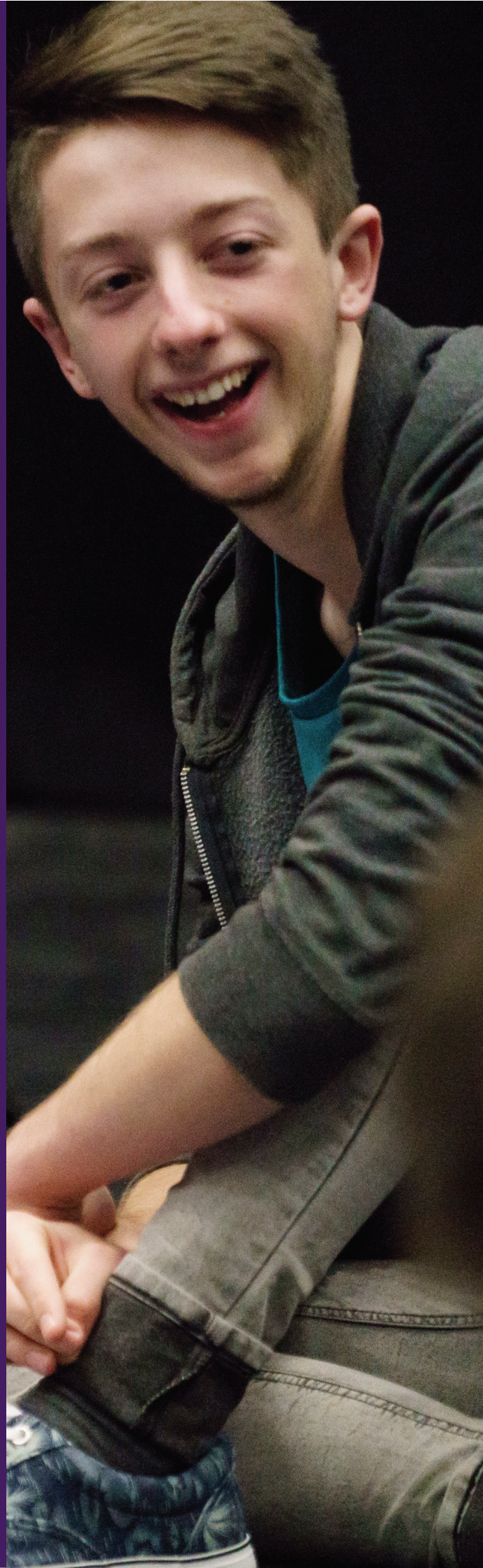
Tom Dodsley

Jade Murden

Tonimarie Benaton

Alix Manning-Jones

The Plus One Community



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# SUMMARY

This study was funded by the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme (DANCOP). It focusses mainly on a series of holiday workshops run by the Derby Cultural Education Partnership (CEP) for young people with direct experiences of the care system. The findings reported here result from a variety of qualitative methods and represent the shared understanding of Plus One between researchers from the University of Derby, arts practitioners at Derby Theatre and the other CEP partners and the young people who participate in the programme.

## METHODS AND DATA

Data collection methods were multiple and evolved as the project developed in response to greater understanding of the Plus One programme and the needs of the participants. They involved interviews with project staff, artists participating in Plus One and other stakeholders. Researchers spent several days observing as participants in Plus One activities to develop relationships with the young people and artists. Carers were interviewed and some young people also took part in one to one interviews where both carers and they were happy to do so. We also organised a big brother diary room exercise, undertook a focus group with older participants using video and photo elicitation (using a film created by Plus One participants) and we analysed the art work produced by Plus One. A major symposium at Derby Theatre was used to disseminate the Plus One experience and we presented our interim findings at this. We collected audience data at this event as a means of assessing the impact of Plus One artistic outputs and wider understandings of the research evidence. Finally, the Plus One community were able to reflect on the report itself and a presentation of the main findings, so that they had a chance to influence the ultimate findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## CONTEXT

The UK care sector has been growing over recent years, and faster than population growth. The reasons for this are not well understood but include a greater sensitivity to protecting young people and broader economic context. There are large variations between local authorities suggesting that at least some of the growth is due to highly localised factors.

Young people who are 'Looked After' by the state and young people who have this background but leave care, have worse educational and wider social outcomes than other groups. While there is a debate in the literature about whether some of this is the result of the care system itself or more the product of prior family circumstances, the fact remains that young people with this background do much worse at school, are more likely to experience negative physical and mental health outcomes, are more likely to be the victims of crime and to offend, and to experience homelessness. Whether or not the care system itself contributes to these outcomes or merely fails to fully mitigate them, it is clear that more needs to be done to support Looked After Children to experience more positive and equitable social outcomes.

Arts based interventions have been shown in previous research to be effective in supporting other relatively marginalised groups – such as refugees and offenders – to better understand their experiences of marginalisation and the social structures which create marginalisation. These methods have been shown to create a greater sense of power among participants to challenge these structures. This research explores whether Plus One has these effects on young people with a care background. In doing so it explores one recent thematic debate in the literature on Looked After Children – whether ethics of care and justice are compatible and can be pursued simultaneously in a particular intervention. Both Plus One and the research addresses questions that are much bigger than an evaluation of a series of holiday clubs, such as normative issues about the meaning of care and caring relationships.

## ABOUT PLUS ONE

Plus One includes a number of strands of activity but our main focus was on the operation of workshops for young people with care background during school holidays. These workshops have the following significant characteristics:

- 3–4 days of activities;
- All children and young people have a care background, though not all will be in care at the time they participate (for e.g. they may have been adopted or they may be care leavers);
- There is some continuity among participants: they may not always be exactly the same but many of the children and young people involved in a particular session will have been involved in previous

sessions, so that they become familiar with project staff, the environment and each other;

- Mixed age groups with ages ranging from 6 years old to early 20s;
- Nos of participants vary but are in the range of 8–15;
- All participants receive lunch and each day lasts from 10am until 4pm;
- Participants are 'selected' by referral from the Derby City or Derbyshire County Virtual Schools, through self-referral after seeing publicity or being made aware of the project.
- Multiple arts activities, with performance (using Playback and Forum techniques) predominating but also including illustration, film making, music, singing, dancing, story writing and poetry;
- Multiple professional artists and artist-pedagogues are present during each session and these dictate the arts practice covered; and
- Sessions may take place at multiple venues and frequently involve visits to educational or other facilities in the City.
- While all workshops produce some distinct outputs, there are occasions where there is continuity between workshops so that a story line or production of outputs stretches across several holidays, and may therefore involve different participants contributing over the course these distinct sessions.

In addition to the holiday workshops, there is a smaller group of Plus One Ambassadors who have participated in previous holiday workshops and are usually older and may also be care leavers. The Ambassadors

support Plus One; helping to raise funds and contributing to the development of content themes for the workshops.

## FINDINGS

**Our key findings included the following:**

### **Multiple objectives and partly contested theories of change**

Plus One has been supported by multiple and overlapping funders, with project staff working creatively and in an entrepreneurial fashion to piece this often very short-term funding together to sustain the programme. This has resulted in a wide range of some externally and some internally constructed objectives and often implicit theories of change. There are some common elements to these such as the use of culture and creativity to develop skills and attributes which might enhance long-term employability. In addition, young people expressed their own motivations for participating in Plus One which were often less instrumental and more related to having fun. We found that project staff tried hard to reconcile all these different objectives, and where they were difficult to reconcile, to hold them in creative tension. They also pursued additional objectives of their own, such as spreading experience and awareness of art as processes which were seen as intrinsically valuable aside from any instrumental benefits that they may bring.

### **The role of creative pedagogy and sustained relationships**

Perhaps the most significant finding related to Plus One is that it follows a creative pedagogical approach influenced by social pedagogy. The essence of this in the context of Plus One is collaboration and co-production between professional artists and the young people. The outputs from this involve the art work produced, but they also include high quality and trusting relationships between adults and young people and between young people themselves, which are sustained over time.

### **Stakeholder and partner engagement**

Plus One is characteristic of extremely strong partnership working, especially between those organisations that provide artists to support the programme but also the wider CEP partners. There are very strong flows of information and cross-fertilisation of ideas, practice and learning between partners, with the incorporation of the creative mentoring process into the Plus One model being one good example of this.

### **Resource constraints**

Plus One is delivered on tight and often short-term budgets. The programme has received some stability from slightly longer-term funding recently but this is still only three years in duration. The programme relies on extremely skilled delivery and also requires a mix of skills that are hard to find – such as strong administration alongside creativity and a caring ethos. These are difficult skill mixes to find and sustain, and it in replicating the model elsewhere this should be considered very carefully.

### **Carer experiences**

Carers we spoke to were all supportive of Plus One and recognised the impact of the programme in developing long-term instrumental capacities such as communication skills, confidence and employability alongside more immediate objectives such as young people having fun during school holidays.

### **Effects on young people**

Young people reported that Plus One was fun and some of the older participants were able to express ideas of skill development in ways that resonated with the objectives of the programme around education and employability. However, they also reported that they found Plus One to be a caring environment in which they developed strong and supportive relationships with adults and other young people. They reported that these relationships had helped them to develop confidence that had positive effects in other

parts of their lives such as moving into different phases of education, leaving care and entering work. While firm attribution of these effects to a programme intervention is difficult for researchers, some of the young people involved made these causal links between Plus One and positive life and skill developments.

### **Understanding self**

Some of the young people involved in the research reported that participation had helped them to better understand and come to terms with their own life experiences. This was something that young people discussed with each other as a mutual benefit; understanding of self and others.

### **Challenging the care system**

If the internal dynamic of Plus One reflects a very strong 'ethic of care', the content of much of the art produced – whether or not for wider dissemination – is focussed on a strongly expressed 'ethic of justice'. It seeks to share the lived experience of being in the care system and the emotional effects of bureaucratised and institutionalised care. It challenges the meaning of care and makes a claim for more affective, emotional and sustained caring relationships. Some of this art has been disseminated publicly and to professionals in the care and arts sectors. Whether the content of Plus One art always needs to focus on the care background is a moot point discussed in the report, but this is a feature of the programme currently.

### **Artistic dissemination and audience impact**

We tracked the impact of Plus One artistic outputs and our own research on an audience at a major symposium held at Derby Theatre in October 2018. The evidence collected suggested that the audience had been impacted by the event and that several individuals had been affected in a major way by what they saw and heard; including decisions to become a carer or change their professional practice.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our main conclusions are:

### **Impact on young people**

It is difficult to objectively measure the impact of the programme in terms of skills development and employability, but on the balance of evidence collected it would be difficult to conclude that the programme does not have these positive effects. The extent to which this is the case is harder to judge, especially when employability is such a long-term and multi-faceted and relational quality, rather than being a measurable and static set of tangible assets.

### **Factors influencing programme participation**

Programme participation was judged in the main by reflections of carers and young people and stakeholders. With the caveat in place that selection bias means we were not able to fully assess why individuals might not participate.

### **Creative cultures of care**

The Plus One scheme embodies a creative ethos of care, in which care is focussed on drawing out the creativity in young people, and sustaining relationships that support this process. The process of recognising, supporting and fostering creativity in others is part of a process of valuing people and co-production helps to develop trusting relationships. At the same time Plus One also uses creativity to challenge the culture of care that it depicts in the formal care system, with the depiction coming largely from young people. This is highly complex, but at root there are multiple and rival cultures of care in evidence in Plus One internally in the relationships fostered within the programme and externally in the way that art work challenges social and institutional structures.

### **Contingent coping**

The wider context of public spending, social need and austerity create opportunities for

creative partnership working between social services, education and the cultural sector in which there may be mutual benefits. However, all three sectors also face challenges and these partnerships may also present risks to all parties. We saw evidence of creativity in coping with short-term and shifting funding streams and partnerships that helped this coping process. However, in looking at extending and replicating these partnerships it is important to also pay attention to the risks associated with this in terms of social outcomes and institutional pressures.

#### Core elements of the programme

There is widespread interest in extending and developing aspects of the Plus One model. Those interested in this need to fully understand the core elements of the programme that work together to help it have positive effects. Without these elements working together, the programme may not be so effective. We judged these to be (a) the development and ongoing nature of caring relationships which limit scale and mean staff selection and retention is crucial; (b) the mix of skills among core staffing is crucial and it is difficult to source creativity and caring skills alongside the administration required by the programme; (c) strong and trusting relationships with carers; (d) high quality partnership working between artists and artistic organisations and with Virtual Schools and the care sector are essential to sustain young people's participation and the quality of the offer to them; (e) there is a need to very carefully balance risk and safeguarding; (f) a focus on age-appropriate co-production between highly skilled and professional artists

and young people at a variety of stages of artistic development; (g) a balance between caring and seeking justice which is consciously and carefully negotiated.

#### Implications for HE

There are a variety of ways that Universities can learn from the programme and support young people with a care background to benefit from HE. One of the lessons that came from young people is that accessing HE may be one structured route by which the transition to independence from the care system is managed, and Universities do already support this. However, the young people we spoke to were also concerned that University isn't for 'people like them'. As such there is more that Universities and University staff could do to build and support awareness and to work on making the environment more accessible. These include summer schools, supporting young people to access open days and also better understanding the student experience.

# 1 | INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the findings and conclusions from a year-long study on Derby Cultural Education Partnership's (CEP) Plus One Scheme. While Plus One is a project sponsored by all CEP partners it is operated largely through Derby Theatre and comprises a range of activities, including providing free tickets to the Theatre for marginalised groups, but the main focus of our research was the holiday activities for Looked After Children which are run through the scheme. These incorporate three-four day workshops incorporating multiple art forms and tend to involve between 5 and 20 young people with care background.

The research sought to answer on a variety of questions associated with the experience and effects of Plus One. It was funded by the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme and therefore involved a specific emphasis on access to Higher Education, which was in line with the objectives of Plus One, one of which is to raise educational aspirations, including in relation to HE. While figures are contested it is widely accepted that people with a care background have much lower levels of access to HE, and the research explored what role interventions like Plus One might play in challenging this inequity.

The research incorporated mixed methods and methods evolved throughout the study as they were adapted via iterative experience and feedback from young people. A key finding from research with young people with care backgrounds is that they often experience a lack of control over their lives. Plus One has an inbuilt ethos of placing young people

in control of the artistic process, partly as a product of this wider knowledge. This research also attempted to incorporate that emphasis and this underpins the listing of the Plus One Community as authors of this research. The context meant that listing individual names as authors was difficult; there were both too many young people and several were subject to child protection concerns. However, we want to emphasise from the outset that this report represents data collected from, by and analysed alongside the young people and practitioners who form the Plus One community. The report represents our shared understanding of the meaning, experiences and effects of Plus One.



# 2 | METHODS AND DATA

## 2.1 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research sought to answer the following key research questions:

- I. To what extent, and how, does participation in the project generate the outcomes envisaged in the Project Brief?
- II. How do those involved in delivering the project conceive its aims and objectives, and underlying theory of change? To what extent do these align with or are they limited to those outcomes listed in the Project Brief?
- III. How do beneficiaries experience the project(s) and with what impacts, including but not limited to those listed in the Project Brief? Specifically, how has participation affected beneficiaries' aspirations for, and attitude towards, educational decision making and progression to Higher Education?
- IV. How do significant others understand the projects to have affected beneficiaries?
- V. What factors affect participation in the project(s), including the home lives of beneficiaries and the ways that other services and service providers interact with the project(s)?

## 2.2 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection proceeded through multiple methods, and since the research opened up new avenues of inquiry, this is ongoing. The data collection involved the following:

- Semi-structured interviews with project staff
- Semi-structured interviews with partners and stakeholders
- Semi-structured interviews with carers
- Observations of Plus One holiday activities as adult-participants
- Semi-structured interviews and automated data collection with young people
- A group discussion with care leavers based on photo/video elicitation
- Analysis of the art work produced by Plus One Activities
- Re-interpretation of the findings with the Plus One community
- Analysis of project documentation and evaluation data

The research team did not have access to data collected through self-completion questionnaires at the beginning and end of Plus One sessions as these needed to be returned to funders and were not 'our data'. Given that multiple funders support Plus One activity, the participants had been required to complete several questionnaires which were often not age appropriate in design, it was difficult for us to administer additional data collection tools in this way. There is some discussion in the literature about one explanation for a lack of evidence in arts-based interventions with vulnerable groups being the absence of high quality methods based on use of self-completion resilience or other psychological scales with participants and comparison with control groups. While such methods may have considerable merits they also have some important drawbacks; they may lead to an over-emphasis on this data relative to other

data which is problematic because multiple self-completion questionnaires may 'train' respondents to answer questions in particular ways, because it is difficult to isolate the effects of the programme relative to other wider influences in participants lives. This is more significant for children with care background than most other groups for a variety of reasons: sample sizes are always likely to be small; responses are likely to vary at different points in time for reasons unrelated to the intervention; the objectives of the programme may not be realised for a very long time and long after measurement is likely to end and it is very difficult to isolate a suitable control group. Furthermore, our observation of participants completing the forms demonstrated that literacy was also an issue for some of the young people who were not able to self-complete and required a reader and a scribe. The team judged this to have the potential to negatively effect participants engagement with the activities themselves before they have even begun. While we recognise the value that a self-completion scale would have contributed to the data we collected, our inability to do so is offset by the mixed methods approaches outlined above.

It is also worth noting that the project involved a great deal of experimentation and reflection on data collection methods. The team were initially very concerned to ensure that an ethical commitment to avoid harm to participants was upheld and therefore we developed a variety of data collection methods which involved the young people taking control of the process. For example, we devised games based on super-hero identities and an 'automated' big brother diary room exercise which involved young people working alone with an ipad

and choosing the questions they wanted to answer from a narrated presentation which had frequent pauses and reminders that they could choose to stop the process. In the end responses from the young people themselves suggested that relatively informal but straightforward interviews were the best way to go about data collection and we abandoned these more innovative methods. Informality and setting appeared to matter to avoid the experience being characteristic of a care setting or formal 'interview' which they might have experienced as part of evidence collection for care interventions. In this, researchers' efforts to engage with the young people over a long period of time as part of their Plus One experience, helped to ensure that positive relationships, familiarity and trust were in place before data collection commenced. There were though one or two interviews where researchers used their judgement to retreat from sensitive topics where it appeared that they might generate emotional stress.

Additionally, the video/photo elicitation method where we screened one of the film projects that the young people had made and then used stills from the film as a means of eliciting responses, worked very well indeed as a means of stimulating discussion and allowing the participants to illustrate themes that were sometimes visible to the research team in the artwork but also themes that we had not noticed. This method also revealed a range of deeper findings related to the Plus One experience that were not related to the art produced. We would recommend this method of data collection in particular for similar research projects in the future.

## 2.3 RESEARCH ETHICS

The project was ethically challenging in multiple respects and a series of strategies were employed to manage risks. First, these related to securing consent from young people who were vulnerable at the outset, by definition. Observations of Plus One activities were undertaken with the verbal permissions of carers and young people. Observations were related to the practice of professionals and no data was collected from young people themselves during these observations. Observations and researcher participation in Plus One activities spanned several holiday sessions prior to engaging directly with young people. This allowed the researchers to become familiar to young people prior to engaging directly with them. In most cases researchers had been known to young people for between 3–6 months prior to engaging them in data collection.

Interviews and other data collection from young people involved several stages of informed consent. Carers were asked to provide written consent in advance of asking young people themselves, and this consent was secured in a personal meeting between a researcher and the carer. Young people were then asked to provide consent to engage in direct data collection, with at least two adults being present in the discussion with young people to ensure that appropriate standards of information and support to young people was in place. Young people then provided written consent. In place of interviews the research team first attempted data collection from young people using an iPad and survey software which involved them being able to choose questions to answer and frequent reminders that they could withdraw at any time. However, following feedback from the young people this method was abandoned in favour of semi-structured interviews. All carers were debriefed after the data collection with young people to provide an opportunity to pass on any concerns about the impact the

interviews might have had on the young people. Young people were able throughout to stop the interview or to skip questions and interviewers were briefed in advance to ensure that they were sensitive to avoiding harm and triggering negative emotional responses during the interviews. Interviews were curtailed on a small number of occasions as a result of this, and this was reported to carers.

Older young people who were care leavers were involved in semi-structured interviews and a focus group related to the art and performance that they produced. Their consent was sought in the normal way with a pre-briefing on the purpose of the research, a chance to ask questions and securing informed, specific and explicit consent using standard consent sheets. Like all other research participants young people were provided with an information sheet to take with them. All participants were provided with information about how to withdraw from the study.

At the end of sessions where observations and data collection with young people were involved, a full de-brief between researchers and project staff was undertaken. This was an opportunity to raise any safeguarding or disclosure concerns and to provide formal information sharing with carers or professional services.

## 2.4 DATA CODING

Where permissions were received all interview data was recorded digitally and fully anonymised transcripts were produced. These were coded in an iterative fashion using Critical Grounded Theory (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017) techniques. At several stages during the data collection process the research team met and discussed possible thematic interpretations of the data collected. When all data collection was complete the research team all coded a selection of data and met again to discuss possible thematic codes, again focussing on possible interpretations, drawing on earlier

discussions. The meeting resulted in the production of an initial coding framework which was then used by all members of the team to code all data collected, with scope to alter and amend this coding framework for all members of the team. Following this, the team met again to discuss and reconcile thematic codes. These were then used to present interim findings at a major symposium on the cultural sector and care in October 2018, and audience reflections were collected via response slips. These findings were then also presented back to the Plus One Community, including the young people who are beneficiaries of Plus One. This was undertaken in order to give the Plus One community a role in the data interpretation process and reflections on our interpretations were collected and adjustments were made to the findings and conclusions to reflect the views of the young people.



# 3 | CONTEXT

## 3.1 THE UK CARE SECTOR

In March 2018 there were 75,420 Looked After Children in England (Department for Education, 2018a). This is an increase of 3% on 2016 and continues a long-term increase since the early 1990s and a pronounced year on year increase since the late 2000s. In the year to March 2018 the number of children and young people leaving care to adoption 3,820 which is a decrease by 13% on 2017 and down from a peak of 5,360 adoptions in 2015.

The number of children who are taken into care has risen by almost triple the rate of population growth. Between 2010–11 and 2017–18 the number of children in care at year end increased by 15% to 75,420 children, more than triple the rate of overall population growth. There has been a notable increase in the number of children over 16 taken into care, which increased by 78% between 2010–11 and 2017–18, from 3,210 to 5,710 and who Local Authorities say often have more complex needs (National Audit Office, 2019, p. 8). Since 1994 there has been a gradual long-term increase in the number of children in care in England, which has increased by 48% between 1994 and 2018 (16). The NAO find that the demand for care placements has outstripped capacity and the care system is under acute pressure.

The overall population is changeable with 32,810 entering care and 31,250 children ceasing to be Looked After in the year to 2017, the largest proportion of which (32%) returned home, 14% left care to independent living and 14% were adopted. The average duration in care for those who left during the year to March 2017 was 759 days, a reduction on the previous year, representing a continuation of a trend seen in recent years. Most children ceasing

to be Looked After (85%) had experienced only one period of care. Just under a quarter of placements ending during the year to 2017 lasted less than a month; 22% lasted a year or more. Overall, the mean duration of placements was 314 days in 2016–17. Placements in residential schools tend to last longer than other types of placement.

The profile of Looked After Children is heterogeneous. There are more males than females (56%/44%). One recent driver of the increase in numbers of Looked After Children and males in particular is the arrival of unaccompanied asylum seekers (up by 6% between 2016–17 at 4,560 and 134% since 2013). 75% of Looked After Children are white, 9% of mixed ethnicities, 7% are black or black British, 5% were Asian or Asian British and 3% from other ethnic groups. Non-white children are slightly over represented among Looked After Children, though Asian children are slightly under-represented.

The reasons for being in care vary, though the majority (63%) are due to 'abuse or neglect', with family dysfunction (15%), families in acute stress (8%), absent parents (6%) almost all of whom are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and parents or children's health or disability accounting for 3% each. Most Looked After Children are under a Care Order (73%) rather than voluntary arrangement (19%). 73% or 55,200 Looked After Children are in foster placements and increase in number from 53,010 in 2017, with the majority of these (59%) within the Local Authority boundary, and 18% are fostered by families or friends.

There were 450 Looked After Children in Derby and 630 in Derbyshire at the end of March 2017, reflecting a rate of 75 and 41 per 10,000

children respectively, against an England-wide rate of 62. 200 children entered care in 2016–17 in Derby and 295 in Derbyshire, while those leaving care in the year were 210 and 255 respectively. In terms of outcomes for Care leavers in Derby and Derbyshire, Table 1 shows figures for those aged 19–21 now who were in care for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, with some of this being after their 16th birthday. This shows that care leavers in Derby and Derbyshire in 2016–17 were more likely to be in training or employment than the England average and less likely to be in Higher Education, or equivalent. The NEET figure for both Derby and Derbyshire is below the England average. Those in Derbyshire were more likely than on average to report being NEET due to illness, and in Derby due to being pregnant. The sample sizes for these data are small and should therefore be treated with some caution in terms of comparison.

## 3.2 EDUCATION

It is widely understood that there are significant educational attainment gaps for different groups of disadvantaged young people and that children and young people in care are one of those. The significant and persistent gaps in the attainment of children and young people in care and other children is a long-noted problem (S Jackson, 1998; Welbourne & Leeson, 2012). For example, the gap between Looked After Children and the rest in terms of percentages that reached the expected levels across English, Maths and Science in Key Stage One was over 20 points in all subjects in 2017 (Department for Education, 2018b). Within the Looked After Children group, girls tend to do better than boys across the board and especially in reading and writing. Overall, 51%

reached the expected standard in reading, 39% in writing and 46% in Maths at this age. Data shows a disproportionate number of school exclusions amongst looked-after children (Paget et al., 2018).

Attainment gaps continue as children get older. By the end of Key Stage Two only 32% of Looked After Children (compared with 61% of non-Looked After Children) reach the expected level of performance across all subjects, though this is higher in individual subjects. Key Stage Two results suggest that the prominence of Special Educational Needs among Looked After Children (59% of Looked After Children have SEN compared with 17% of non-Looked After Children) is a contributor to this gap, but does not explain it since Looked After Children and non-Looked After Children without SEN still have a large attainment gap (70%–57% reaching the expected standard across reading, writing and Maths). Indeed, gaps between Looked After and non-Looked After Children among those with SEN are much smaller. At Key Stage Four gaps continue to persist and even widen. 17.5% of Looked After Children achieved a pass (grade 4 and above for 2017 onwards) in English and Maths compared with nearly 59% of non-Looked After children. Again, SEN is a major contributory factor but does not fully explain the difference. There are large and significant gaps between the attainment of Looked After Children and non-Looked After Children both with (6.4% points for children with a statement and 9.1% points for those with SEN support) and without SEN (18.5% points) (Department for Education, 2018b).

Table 1: Destinations for Care Leavers aged 19–21 in England

		Local authority has information								Local Authority does not have information
		No. of care leavers aged 19–21	In higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	In education other than higher education	In training or employment	Total number in education, employment or training	Illness/ disability	Other reasons	Pregnancy or parenting	
England		27,010	6	19	25	50	11	23	7	10
North East		1,320	7	14	29	50	14	21	9	6
North West		3,450	6	16	26	49	14	22	9	6
Yorkshire and The Humber		2,160	6	17	26	50	12	20	9	8
East Midlands		1,920	4	17	28	49	12	21	5	13
Derby		130	x	15	34	53	9	20	12	6
Derbyshire		265	9	9	35	53	22	16	7	3
West Midlands		3,060	6	16	23	46	9	25	8	11
East of England		2,750	6	19	25	50	11	23	7	8
London		5,850	8	24	20	52	4	26	5	12
South East		3,920	5	21	24	50	11	20	6	14
South West		2,570	4	17	29	49	16	20	7	8

Source: Table LAFa, Local Authority Tables SFR50/2017, National Statistics: *Children looked after in England including adoption: 2016 to 2017*

Progress from compulsory to further and Higher Education is also a noted problem and a noted gap in the literature and evidence base (Cameron, Jackson, Hauari, & Hollingworth, 2012, p. 338). Recent research (Harrison, 2017; Sebba et al., 2015) suggests that young people with care background are much less likely than the rest of the population to go on to study at HE. Estimates of HE participation among this group range from as low as 6% to 11% but are far below the overall 43% average. Even when young people with care background are compared with others who share their socio-economic and health characteristics but without care experience, they have a much lower participation rate. Further, when they do start HE courses, they are much less likely to be retained on their course, despite achieving comparable 'good honours' degrees to other students when they do progress to the end of the course.

Poor educational outcomes are significant in and of themselves but may also be related to a range of additional negative outcomes (S Jackson, 2010). The evidence suggests that children with care backgrounds are significantly more likely to also experience poor outcomes in relation to health, employment, general well-being, homelessness, incarceration and mental health problems (O'Higgins, Sebba, & Luke, 2015, p. 6). For example, children or young people in care for more than a year are five times more likely to be to offend than other children (Department for Education, 2017). The evidence suggests that there are similar attainment gaps in other countries, though the specifics of this differ from country to country (Sonia Jackson & Höjer, 2013; O'Higgins et al., 2015). A cross national systematic review (O'Higgins et al., 2015) found that:

“The conclusions from these reviews are unequivocal: as a group, children in care lag behind their peers on a number of measures of educational attainment, including grades, literacy and numeracy test scores, attendance and exclusions.”

For instance, in Sweden children and young people in care do well in terms of attaining the basic secondary school qualification but less well at higher levels of education (Höjer & Johansson, 2013). Low levels of participation in higher education are common throughout Europe (S. Jackson & Cameron, 2014, p. 251). In North America the relative absence of welfare services means that the transition from care is particularly problematic, though additional years in care after 18 do seem to have some positive benefits (Courtney & Okpych, 2017).

It is often (implicitly and explicitly) (Welbourne & Leeson, 2012, p. 129) assumed in official reports both that attainment gaps are the result of differences of experience in the education system and that the education and social services system(s) can therefore correct these gaps (Department of Health, 1998; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). While such a view may have been helpful in strengthening institutional levers to support children and young people in care, there is an ongoing debate about the extent to which it is the experience of care and the care system itself that causes these gaps, or a mix of additional factors such as pre-care experiences, continuing problems associated with contact with birth families, cohort problems associated with successful care experiences leading to children leaving the 'care cohort', the overlap of other explanatory factors such as poverty. As such, Brodie (2010, p. 2) concludes that:

“There is a serious lack of evidence about the complex learning and behavioural needs of many looked-after young people and the ways in which they do or do not benefit from recent policy and other initiatives.”

For example, Berridge has long argued (Berridge, 2007, 2012), the evidence is more complex than this. Children and young people in care often have negative experiences or additional disadvantages which explain their educational attainment gaps. In this context school and care effects



on educational performance may be hidden in simple correlations. Indeed, he cites persuasive evidence that once in care children often progress well and recover some lost attainment, even acknowledging that they may still be subject to some of the disadvantages that affect their pre-care attainment. Berridge's case was supported by a major review of The Educational Progress of Looked Children in England (Sebba et al., 2015) which confirmed that children in care on average do better when in care than before, do better the longer they stay in care and do better in care than other similar 'children in need' but not in care. The review also confirmed that children in care are more likely to have other markers of lower educational progress such as Special Educational Needs. The general message from this review is that care is usually a positive influence on educational progress, with some exceptions: where children and young people experience multiple changes in their care placements or school place, both of which suggest other problems may be present.

Berridge (2017) suggests that young people fall into several different categories in relation to their own agency in relation to education, but that they nearly always display agency, even when this appears to onlookers as negative in educational terms. He draws particular attention to the idea of a 'social ecology of resilience' from the work of Ungar (Ungar, 2011) in which there is an emphasis on exogenous conditions in creating the environment in which resilience and other internal characteristics can flourish. Berridge (2017) argues that his sample suggests that Looked After Children always demonstrate agency, but that the impact of this on their educational attainment is often (though by no means universally) heavily mediated by having the conditions in place to support them. Such factors include "living somewhere which they felt was stable, secure and in which they felt they were genuinely cared for" with "stable and fulfilling relationships...", and that birth family 'issues' were managed so that "young people need to

be protected from family stress, or helped to deal with it, in order to get on with their own lives and create new opportunities" (92).

In contrast to Berridge, Jackson (2007, p. 4) argues that "I strongly disagree with his conclusion, however, that the answer is to be found in the characteristics of the families from which children in care are drawn and not in the shortcomings of the care system." Her research suggests that over a long period of time the care system has placed insufficient attention on educational success (Jackson, 2010).

Disentangling the effect of the care system itself on children's educational progress is incredibly difficult because these children are an exceptionally heterogeneous group. Children are looked after in different contexts; residential care, kinship care, short and longer-term foster placements and children leave care to adoption or to return to their families. Moreover, time in care can be long or short and multiple. Therefore, comparing those in care with those not in care with any success is a complex process (Hannon, Wood, & Bazalgette, 2010, p. 121; Welbourne & Leeson, 2012, p. 131). In their systematic review O'Higgins et al. (2015) agreed that pre-care experiences have a significant effect on the educational performance of children in care, but also concluded that it appears likely that being in care is also a risk factor for educational attainment. In sum, the evidence is not fully conclusive but suggests that children in care are negatively affected by pre-care experiences which influence their educational attainment, and that the care system may not add considerably to these, but neither does it correct for these negative influences.

Following from this, research suggests that the specifics of care and school environments can be significant in helping young people to make better progress. Kinship placements often facilitate stronger and more unconditional support for young people and longer-term foster placements also appear to create a

more stable and supportive environment for educational progress than residential care settings. Similarly, frequent placement changes, especially where they necessitate changes in schooling and friendship groups are also negatively correlated with progress (Sebba et al., 2015). But here there are selection issues; it may well be that children and young people experiencing less severe pre-care problems and harm are more likely to be in kinship and longer-term foster placements.

At the same time this evidence focuses attention on the characteristic of the people offering care. There is no national dataset on the educational qualifications of foster carers (Sebba et al., 2015, p. 24). This is part of a general lack of systematic information about the profile of foster carers, but where information has been collated it suggests that foster carers are less well qualified than the general population and disproportionately white British compared to the general population and the profile of children and young people in care (Mannay et al., 2017, p. 695; McDermid, Holmes, Kirton, & Signoretta, 2012). Jackson (2007, p. 4) suggests that "we know that there are still local authorities prepared to approve foster carers who are illiterate. In children's homes the position is equally unsatisfactory. The extremely low level of education and training among residential care staff compared with other European countries is well documented". Brown et al. (2019) through case studies of children's homes found no correlation between the qualifications of staff and 'good homes' but did identify that there were 'untrained carers working in dilapidated surroundings doing an excellent job'. They highlight that only 8% of the care-workers in their study had relevant qualifications which makes drawing any correlations impossible but it does in itself illustrate that the job is not adequately professionalised.

School environment is also important. Educational research has long suggested that teacher and institutional perceptions

of children's abilities is important in shaping mutually beneficial learning relationships. Here the emphasis is on whether children 'fit' a predetermined image of what the successful pupil 'looks like'. Pursuing this line of inquiry, Mannay et al. (2017) and colleagues found that children and young people with care backgrounds often reported that they were either discouraged at school or that they felt insufficiently challenged to excel. They suggested that this was because their care background marked them out as different and less likely to succeed in the eyes of at least some teachers and educational professionals. They also reported young people's reflections that the way that the care and education system interact sometimes accentuates this. For example, social worker or review meetings in school, obvious differences in the ways that Looked After Children travel to school or other overt signs of 'difference' helped to reinforce an othering and detrimental positionality for these young people, with negative effects on their educational outcomes.

### 3.3 CULTURAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Mannay et al. (2017) also stress though that children and young people with care backgrounds do retain the agency to be able to resist being positioned in this way. However, crucial in this process is the capacity to draw on sufficient cultural and social capital to be able to mobilise that agency. This echoes much educational research which draws on key Bourdieuan concepts to explain both educational attainment as a mediator between social background and achieved positions in the social hierarchy. Here social capital refers to social ties while it has been widely noted that cultural capital is associated with a wide range of potentially contradictory meanings (Kingston, 2001; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Nevertheless, one widely used definition is that of Lamont and Lareau (1986):



**“For this reason, we propose to define cultural capital as institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion, the former referring to exclusion from jobs and resources, and the latter, to exclusion from high status groups.”**

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggested that pupils' cultural capital is accumulated and transferred to them in the family and that this signals who 'fits' within the prevailing cultures and norms of educational institutions and then later within positions of relative advantage and disadvantage in the labour market also. The schooling system through the formal and hidden curriculum recognises and rewards a habitus which fits most congruently with the educational field, one whose capitals have been inculcated through the home to reflect high levels of valued cultural capital (Bowers–Brown, 2016); as Bourdieu argues the 'habitus acquired in the family underlies the schooling experience' yet the habitus is also 'transformed by schooling' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 87). Bennett et al. (2009, p. 13) argue that cultural capital is not only inculcated but 'drilled' into children by parents who understand that to play the game their children will require certain forms of culture which will predispose them 'to turn their cultural capital into credentials'. The use of capital to maintain the social order demonstrates then that it is not abstract, rather it is 'deeply embedded in relations of power' which makes it possible to reproduce the social order (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002, p. 155). Schooling policies and educational institutions do not just implicitly reward these advantages but also help to produce cultural capital that might be utilised in later selection processes in the labour market and in institutional positions (Goldthorpe, 2007). However, this approach has been interpreted in ways which misrecognise privilege and an assumption that the dominant cultural capital is something that is lacking amongst disadvantaged groups and therefore

needs to be fixed – thus neglecting to challenge existing patterns of inequality. In this way, such approaches to understanding the role of cultural capital invert Bourdieu's emphasis on the reproduction of pre-existing inequalities to show how institutions and interventions can affect transformation albeit in ways that support stratified social mobility rather than equality.

As James (2015, p. 78) argues, many educational researchers find Bourdieu's concepts attractive and useful, though there is great variability in what we might call 'depth in use'; this too has been the case in the recycling of theories of practice that have in turn come back to influence a change in practice. For example, the advantages of the middle-class in their possession of capitals is not questioned rather it is seen as a deficiency of those from lower socio-economic groups rather than a question of how cultural practices become institutionalised (Skeggs, 2004). This selective hijacking of theory has led to a misappropriation of its potential and can be seen in other cases where the individualisation of responsibility for these apparent 'deficits' is applied to pupils, serving to ignore the structural determinants of social position. Yet, it is just such an approach to understanding cultural capital that motivates many interventions targeted at vulnerable groups. The idea here is that institutional interventions can help to equalise the advantages gained by children and young people from middle class households, whether that is effective inside educational institutions or in labour markets. One of the downsides of such approaches though is that they start with a deficit assumption and they individualise the responsibility for the reproduction of advantage and disadvantage in the context of inequalities. To the extent that they may help vulnerable groups to acquire tastes and dispositions that help them to fit into advantageous contexts, such interventions may be desirable, but whether they also challenge the structure of inequality is less clear. Although interventions

may encourage the acquisition of capitals that are valued by the dominant class, the outcome remains stratified by the differences of inculcation and acquisition. Skeggs (2004:77) summarises this succinctly:

**“The technologies which come to produce the self are not floating around a diffuse field of culture, but are embodied in many institutional practices through which forms of individuality are made visible through specification and governance. Yet only some can utilise their culture as a property of the self: others are forced to perform it as a 'natural' part of being.”**

These interventions may then have the unintended and negative consequence of making those targeted feel at odds with the cultural capital of their origins by problematising or stigmatising them (McKenzie, 2013; Skeggs, 1997). Put simply one negative implication of interventions that seek to transfer cultural capital deemed to be advantageous to marginalised or vulnerable groups is that they may merely encourage wider take up of dominant cultures rather than challenge and transform those cultures. As Diane Reay argues this is part of systematic cultural domination which emphasises that the institutions of cultural reproduction such as schools belong to the middle-classes and render other class and ethnic cultures as inferior (2017:76). Some therefore argue that critical pedagogy aimed at egalitarian objectives should seek to understand the transmission of different types of cultural capital designed to challenge the status quo, including 'resistance capital' (Fox, 2016).

Here there is a potential tension within arts interventions with marginalised or vulnerable groups associated with the meaning and purpose of artistic creativity. On the one hand artistic and cultural sector interventions maybe an important means of accessing dominant cultures. On the other, artistic practice often uses art as a vehicle to challenge

such dominant cultures. Indeed, when artists enter traditional educational spaces, they are often regarded with suspicion by educational professionals precisely because they may work in less structured ways, with less emphasis on order and control and with the purpose of challenging accepted norms that educational institutions may often reinforce (Maddock, Drummond, Koralek, & Nathan, 2007; Sellman, 2015; Thomson, Hall, & Russell, 2006).

### 3.4 THE MEANING OF CARE

The focus in policy on educational attainment is at least partly driven by an ethic of justice, set against an assumption that children and young people with a care background were being let down by the system and that aggressive institutional pressures and targets might help to correct this. Over recent years though there has been increasing interest in academic debate in the matching ethics of justice with an ethic of care. Feminist research (Gilligan, 1982; Sevenhuijsen, 2003) has frequently questioned a 'rights based' approach where rights are seen to be the property of atomised individual agents which assume the characteristics of white and male subjects. Rather, drawing on research on how women and non-white communities construct ideas of morality, feminist researchers have drawn attention to the ways in which rights might be constructed in a context specific way and in relation to others. This view of rights and mutual obligations sees an ethic of care as being distinct from an ethic of individualised rights based justice in that it “emphasises people's interdependence and the context of such decisions” (Barnes, 2007, p. 143). As Holland (2010) defines it, an ethic of care:

**“...recognises care relationships that are often hidden or marginalised in public life. It emphasises interdependency in relationships and a recognition that we are all care-receivers and caregivers. In doing so, it de-stigmatises and normalises care,**

**attempting to restore it to the centre of public life, rather than see it as a private act for the vulnerable and needy. It disrupts the boundaries erected between the public and the personal and between decision making that is disinterested and distant and that which recognises the local and particular"**

This definition emphasises the need to be attentive to the needs of others, taking responsibility for meeting these needs, competence in doing so, empathy, integrity and sensitivity to the context in which care is constructed (Tronto, 1994). It also suggests that care is a characteristic of mutual relationships so that care givers are also care receivers and vice-a-versa (Cockburn, 2005). Holland (2010) argues in favour of combining ethics of care and justice but that the emphasis on the latter in the formal care system has devalued the former. She argues that social work and other support for children and young people with a care background need to pay more attention to the establishment of sustained and caring relationships and to facilitate the relationships that young people themselves care for and about.

### 3.5 ARTS AND CULTURAL INTERVENTIONS WITH LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Some argue that creative methods of intervention and research data collection might help to differentiate activities from 'social work encounters' and that they are therefore particularly suited to engaging children and young people with care backgrounds. While methods that share features with social work may lead to resistance and inhibitions, it is argued that "providing participants with the power to lead the research activity through the creation and discussion of visual artefacts creates a more neutral space where they might engage with the research on their own terms" (Mannay et al., 2017, p. 687). This may equally be true in terms of 'fun' interventions

which provide space for mutual learning. The Plus One intervention we were interested in here sits as part of a suite of programmes operated by Derby Theatre and a range of other cultural sector partners which are informed by a 'learning theatre' model. The essence of the learning theatre model is to involve people in a process of cultural production of place through involvement and engagement in the creative process. So while the research undertaken formally as part of the 'evaluation' was formally governed by research ethics procedures and was in some ways distinct from the intervention itself, the intervention is also a form of ongoing artistic and practice based research.

Peeran (2016) undertook a systematic review of studies focussing on arts interventions with children and young people with a care background. Following systematic review techniques and a rather narrow interpretation of 'quality' the review focussed on nine studies that conformed to methodological expectations that they included pre- and post-intervention data collection and a comparison between treatment and non-treatment groups. The review found that there is some evidence that arts interventions lead to increased confidence and self-esteem; emotional resilience and coping through the sharing of experiences; help young people to build and maintain networks, including with people who have similar experiences to themselves; explore new activities which might themselves have ongoing positive impacts such as reading. The review also tracked factors which might facilitate or impair take-up and positive effects. These included the importance of artistic professionals and the extent to which they value the young people and involve them in the ownership and control of the process, cultural fit between the art undertaken and the young people's lives and the role of family and friends in either supporting or inhibiting participation. As an illustration one study found that artists who had a rigid view of the 'art' to be practised might discourage young people as in the case

of a singing project that focussed on 'middle class' or 'folk' music to the exclusion of the musical tastes of the young people involved (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010).

While systematic reviews tend to offer preference to particular methodologies, there are reasons to think that such instrumental methodologies are not well suited to the Theory of Change that underpins artistic interventions with vulnerable or marginalised groups. If the theory of change is related to either the inculcation of cultural capital to enable social fit in advantageous positions in social hierarchies then it is likely that this only manifests over the longer term and only relatively superficial proxy indicators of this can be either 'measured' in self-completion questionnaires and over short-term time horizons and by point in time measurements which are vulnerable to short-term contextual factors (Coholic, Eys, & Loughheed, 2012, p. 841). It is also likely that presence in the intervention and multiple interactions with the self-completion scales will lead to familiarity and positivity among respondents. Moreover, it may be that other theories of change are present which cannot be captured through such measures such as the collective efforts of participants and facilitators to challenge social closure and structures of inequality. None of this is to suggest that such methods are not worthwhile; just that they only capture particular data which might not tell the whole story and may underestimate the impact of interventions. As a result of similar concerns Daykin (2009) argues for diverse qualitative methods that encourage collaboration between researchers, practitioners and participants in arts-based health interventions, and a focus on both individual and collective stories.

Cahaman-Taylor & Siegesmund (2018:5) see the unique nature of arts based research resting in its ability not just to 'record data but to make it', in this sense it is 'generative and searching'. Kaptani and Yuval Davis (2008) explore the potential for performance based activity and research as both research method

and emancipatory activity. They summarise research using Playback and Forum Theatre techniques with refugees and asylum seekers. They conclude that the embodied, dialogic and illustrative nature of these techniques produce different forms of knowledge for researchers and also have the capacity to be transformatory for the participants, helping to build skills, knowledge and capacity to challenge inequitable social structures. By allowing participants to explore their experiences collectively, understand the wider social structures shaping their experience and to enact alternative strategies generate new identities and social relations. They suggest such methods are "particularly useful for studying narratives of identity of marginalised groups as well as for illustrating perceptions and experiences of social positionings and power relations in and outside community groupings". Similarly, O'Neill (2008) argues that biographical story telling through art opens up new and different spaces for understanding of self, others and the relations between them.

Generally, on the question of how and why arts based interventions may have emancipatory or empowering effects with marginalised or oppressed groups, several key themes emerge. For example, Angell et al. (2015) argue that they can be used to facilitate safe spaces in which lived experiences can be explored and understood. In terms of research, it is argued that these safe spaces are best utilised in research alongside traditional sociological research methods (Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Further, it is often argued that arts-based methods work best when they are understood/interpreted through a collaborative process. Gallagher (2008) discusses the value of 'collaborative analysis' which is essentially where participants undertake arts-based research and then are offered opportunities to explain and reflect on the process and the product so that researchers can better make sense/meanings from the work produced.



# 4 | ABOUT PLUS ONE

The Plus One Scheme is part of Derby’s Cultural Education Partnership and is designed to provide exciting and high quality cultural experiences for looked-after children, young people, care leavers and their families across Derby. The scheme began with ‘Plus One’ funding but has subsequently attracted multiple additional sources of funding, including from Esmee Fairbairn, The Mighty Creatives, Curious Monkey, D2N2 and public donations. It is significant to note that funding has been short-term, drawn from multiple funders at any one time and usually secured on a competitive basis. This means that core staff have been employed on a short-term, part time and casual basis. As from October 2018 three years’ worth of funding has been secured from the Esmée Fairbairn foundation and this has enabled core staffing to be increased to add a coordinator and art therapist to the role of artistic facilitator who previously also undertook all logistical coordination activities. Despite previous insecurities in funding and employment the same main artistic facilitator has been in post for the last 24 months.

At a basic level the project is designed around a series of holiday activity clubs designed to enhance the cultural experience of children and young people with care backgrounds. It also enables these children and young people and their families to access subsidised tickets for cultural experiences in the City. The focus of this study is the holiday activities with children and young people.

**Each of the holiday activity ‘sessions’ vary but there is a basic model which is common:**

- 3–4 days of activities;
- All children and young people have a care background, though not all will be in care at the time they participate (for e.g. they may have been adopted or they may be care leavers);
- There is some continuity among participants: they may not always be exactly the same but many of the children and young people involved in a particular session will have been involved in previous

- sessions, so that they become familiar with project staff, the environment and each other;
- Mixed age groups with ages ranging from 6 years old to early 20s;
  - Numbers of participants vary but are in the range of 8–15;
  - All participants receive lunch and each day lasts from 10am until 4pm;
  - Participants are ‘selected’ by referral from the Derby City or Derbyshire County Virtual Schools, through self-referral after seeing publicity or being made aware of the project.
  - Multiple arts activities, with performance predominating but also including illustration, film making, music, singing, dancing, story writing and poetry;
  - Multiple professional artists and artist-pedagogues are present during each session and these dictate the arts practice covered;

- Sessions may take place at multiple venues and frequently involve visits to educational or other facilities in the City; and
- While all sessions produce some distinct outputs, there are occasions where there is continuity between sessions so that a story line or production of outputs stretches across several holidays, and may therefore involve different participants contributing over the course these distinct sessions.

In addition to this, a smaller group of older participants – most of whom have now left care – act as ‘Ambassadors’ for the Plus One scheme. They meet more frequently, act as a steering group for the planning of holiday

activities and artistic dissemination. They also take part in planning and undertaking fundraising activities, engage with institutional funders and evaluation activities. Their role is to help give voice to young people in the design and delivery of Plus One activities. There is usually also one of the group involved in the holiday sessions.

The effects of this design are that there are multiple sessions delivered to a relatively small cohort of participants. This means that there is substantial interaction and depth of engagement with most of the participants involved attending multiple day/holiday sessions.

**Table 2: Plus One Holiday Activity Participation**

Year	Day sessions	No of Young People
2016	21	15
2017	26	18
2018	33	23



The artistic content of different sessions varies. However, the sessions that we observed all had a focus on the care experience. There is a heavy emphasis – rhetorical and real – on ownership and control of the creative process residing with the young people. Despite this there is a relatively frequent emphasis in the content of stories and artwork produced on complex topics associated with care, shifting placements and troubled or discontinuous home life. Beyond this, the sessions follow a common daily structure, with some flexibility to pursue creative tangents:

- A meet and greet session between carers and young people and project staff and artists engaged on that session;
- Extended drama-based warm up activities;
- Collective artistic work as individuals, small groups and whole group activities;
- Sharing of individual contributions and ideas;
- Shared reflections;
- Communal lunch with both young people and adults involved all participating;
- Hand over to carers with the possibility of debrief.

While the collective and individualised art work takes different forms, depending on the specific artists engaged, it always includes a heavy emphasis on story writing and performance. Story writing is done collectively, with a shared narrative drawn together from many different individual contributions. While the performance aspect of this is often quite informal, unplanned and spontaneous, being adapted to develop the story at different points as the story evolves, it includes Playback and Forum techniques to allow participants to explore and develop the stories 'on the go'. Researchers who participated in these activities developed a stronger understanding of the stories and experiences underpinning them as a result of having acted the stories out with the other participants.

After young people leave for the day there is typically a group discussion between project staff and artists involved in that session. This tends to revolve around reflections on what is working well and what might be adjusted, work plans for the following day and also a chance to raise any concerns about the wellbeing of the young people involved. These reflection sessions frequently involve reporting of both practical and emotional responses to the days' activities. These reflective discussions provide a structured opportunity to raise safeguarding or disclosure issues.

As will become clear in the findings section below, these formal elements of the project are augmented by substantial informal elements which include ongoing communication between young people, carers and project staff and frequent additional rehearsal and other sessions which enable ongoing contact and relationship building.

## 5 | FINDINGS

**Plus One has had multiple funders. Each one of these funders comes with their own list of objectives and these are grafted on top of those which were associated with the initial project idea. At a superficial level these exogenous objectives are often similar and revolve around aspiration, skills acquisition, educational attainment and employability. However, the ways these shared objectives are operationalised in more concrete and measurable terms often involve semantic or other subtle differences. Since funders often require particular evaluation activities associated with these objectives, this often has practical implications such as young people having multiple pre- and post-intervention questionnaires to complete.**

Such objectives are common in well meaning and charitable or public policy interventions targeted at 'vulnerable', 'excluded' or 'marginalised' social groups and especially young people. They have an implied theory of change and 'problem' definition subsumed within them. First, the problem definition implied here is in line with common policy understandings of employability (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Here problems of unemployment, insecure or under-employment – are problems that reside with individuals as deficits in their own capacities, dispositions or skills rather than a structural problem in the wider economy. A second aspect of the problem definition here is that it is only by becoming employable that young people with care backgrounds can take up an acceptable position in society, with this being assumed to be key to avoiding other potentially negative outcomes such as physical or mental ill-health, engagement with the criminal justice system or homelessness. The theory of change implied is that interventions can help individuals become more 'employable' by correcting for assumed deficits in 'cultural capital', skills and dispositions. The implicit problem definition and theory of change then imagine an ideal type 'middle class' subject

(with gendered and racialised undertones) and then construct the idea of 'deficits' at the individual scale in response to this. This theory of change has a number of steps that start with 'the intervention' and might assume a relationship with intermediate variables such as educational aspirations, attainment and then employment.

Project staff demonstrated a high degree of creativity in coping and negotiating with these multiple sets of objectives and theories of change, reconciling them where tensions exist. They also clearly understood and acted on externally imposed objectives in line with the 'employability theory of change':

**“supporting care leavers ...so they've been prepped ready to become more independent so developing those life skills like confidence, self-esteem, communication skills... employability... there's different ways people break it down and usually communication and confidence will come as a subset of employability ...”**

Plus One Project Staff.

However, at the same time project staff and partners also recognised weaknesses in this

problem definition and theory of change based on their experiences of the more specific needs of children and young people with care backgrounds. They therefore held employability objectives in creative tension with other objectives:

**“working with an individual that’s who is not in school, is resisting, refusing, excluded and actually working with them on a very slow process of personal development that actually will help them on a very slow process of personal development that actually will help them become more ready to take the steps in terms of the formal route”**

(Plus One Project Staff).

This process of negotiating and reconciling competing demands was highly complex and multi-faceted. Alongside the external objectives of funders and their own understanding of participant needs they also recognised and prioritised two further sets of objectives. The first was simply the intrinsic value of art, artistic practice and cultural experiences. This was occasionally expressed in a way that rejected any additional or instrumental effects and sometimes as being of benefit to participants as enabling self-expression and personal development without further instrumental effects:

**“it provides is a safe space to take risks and they’re artistic voice is taken seriously”**

(Plus One Project Staff).

Finally, some respondents articulated a wider set of objectives which related to the role of artistic and creative practice to challenge social norms and structures, especially as related to social exclusion and inequality. Interestingly, this also aligned to one set of external funder objectives which prioritised social action over employability:

**“theirs is more about social action so for a young person to feel connected to a**

**community and feel that they have a voice within society and that they have had a kind of positive influence over a social challenge... we’re going to use the arts award...”**  
(Plus One Project Staff).

The tensions here are apparent between individualised objectives associated with the predominant problem definition of social exclusion and employability theory of change. On the one hand there is a motivation to help individuals adapt themselves to the ‘realities’ of unequal social structures; to be able to become more like the image of the ‘successful’ individual. On the other is a desire to challenge the social structures which generate inequalities in the first place, which might involve recognising these and articulating alternatives, including through rejecting the idea of individuals accumulating the sorts of cultural capital that powerful social groups use to create social closure of opportunities. Holding such contradictory objectives in creative tension is no mean feat, but project staff exhibited considerable dexterity in doing this. Below we draw on the primary way in which this creative tension is held in check; the difference between the internal ethic of care in the relationships between project staff and young people and the external promotion of an ethic of justice through the creation of art which challenges social norms. Also key to reconciling these two objectives in this way was a recognition of the needs and interests of the young people themselves. These included progress through the education system and therefore a recognition of the employability theory of change but were not limited to this. Rather project staff sought to respond to individuals’ own aspirations. In doing so, project staff exhibited characteristics of frontline social work practice which are noted in wider research. This research suggests that face to face service delivery with vulnerable groups often leads practitioners to alter external policy motivations to marry their own intrinsic motivations and the expressed interests of service users or beneficiaries (M Barnes &

Prior, 2009; Dobson, 2015). Hargreaves et al. (Hargreaves, Hodgson, Mohamed, & Nunn, 2018) suggest that the contingent ways that frontline service delivery attempts to help beneficiaries adjust to social realities while also confronting them might be termed a process of ‘contingent coping’.

We also asked the young people themselves about their own motivations. Again, some of the older participants recognised the employability theory of change, though they were less committed to this generally. Rather, overall the young people were much less instrumental, long-term or serious about their motivations. Understandably they often expressed much more prosaic and short-term motivations. These included the opportunity to just ‘have fun’ during the school holidays and also included reference to the warm and caring atmosphere among project staff and other participants.

**“its very... everyone’s very cheery.... everyone gets on with each other...its all very sure... planned...my favourite thing was playing to the music and singing...”**

(Plus One Participant).

## 5.2 CREATIVE PEDAGOGY AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

The design and structure of the activities is the subject of a great deal of thought and iterative development. The whole programme is informed by a social pedagogy and co-production with young people as drawn from the practice of partners (see below). As the programme has developed project staff have made adjustments to learn from experience. For example, project staff members spoke about the need to ensure a positive welcome and start to each holiday project. They felt this was essential to ensure that all participants feel comfortable and engage with the activities.

Equally, our observational data suggested that the choice of staffing was of central importance to the success of the project. Not any artist would have the skills and empathy to support this group of young people. Project staff had an exceptional capacity to generate connections with young people. Partners also spoke about consciously selecting artists with the skills and aptitudes to engage with young people.

In order to facilitate these positive working relationships, the Plus One model relies heavily on sustained relationships between artists and young people. Again, this is part of the transfer of practice between project partners. This is clearly the case in relation to the core Plus One staff, who often maintain contacts with participants and carers between holiday sessions and organise additional rehearsals and creative sessions outside of holidays to sustain contact and engagement with participants. It was also the case in relation to the supply of artistic practitioners from partner organisations, several of whom selected artists on the grounds that they will have engaged with these young people previously.

A further central element of the programme is the way that young people’s prior experiences are taken account of. Some project staff spoke of ‘not reading the file’, as an ethical commitment to getting to know young people directly, in a way that they would with any other young person participating in structured activities. At the same time, a great deal of care and attention was paid to speaking to carers, learning about the specific interests, motivations and barriers that individual young people might face. This allowed activities to be tailored to the interests and aptitudes of individual young people. Plus One staff and the majority of the artistic practitioners involved in the project were clearly motivated by the need to provide space for young people to share in the creative process, but without forcing this: “if they are not ready to share with the group then thats also [part of the ethos].” This again was part of the overall approach of allowing each individual participant to exercise control.



## 5.3 STAKEHOLDER AND PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Many of the Cultural Education Partnership partners are involved in the delivery of Plus One such as Baby People, déda, QUAD and the University of Derby. They have either hosted visits from young people, film shows or been involved in direct delivery of artistic experiences; Baby People often provide a music professional to work with young people on music production as part of the holiday activities.

Stakeholders and partners provided evidence of general support for the Plus One programme. There was clearly a strong working relationship between the various partners involved. Where partners were actually engaged in delivery there was evidence of the careful selection of artists to have professional artistic skills but also to fit within the supportive and caring ethos of the programme.

The wider partnership here also demonstrated learning from experience and sharing of this learning between partners and stakeholders. For example, the Derbyshire Virtual School has long engaged in artistic practice with young people in care and care leavers and learning from this experience has clearly shaped practice at Derby Theatre. Other partners also spoke about explicitly learning from the social pedagogy as practised in Derbyshire Virtual School.

Indeed, as the Plus One programme is developing it is expanding to take on elements of practice that have been pioneered in the county, such as 'Creative Mentoring'; and Derby City has sponsored activities also. These flows of learning are quite informal, operating through channels of personal relationships rather than formal committees or reporting. They also flow through ad-hoc relationships such as artists who happen to be creative mentors and engaged with the Theatre. The informal artistic space of collaboration between cultural

organisations is clearly central to this information flow.

Another impressive element of the programme is the degree to which partners support one another in relation to the uncertain and often very short-term funding environment within which they work. There were examples of partners engaging in creative partnership working to overcome short-term funding gaps and to support one another to access external funding to keep the Plus One programme going. This suggests a mature cultural partnership environment. What was most impressive of all was the extent to which this 'wiring' was 'hidden'. Participants would have no idea that such creative bricolage was underway behind the scenes to ensure that the programme, and the relationships it supports, is maintained.

A core element of the partnership working involved related to building a network of relationships with and around young people. For example, young people often became engaged with creative mentors facilitated by the Virtual School. The creative mentor may then refer them to Plus One, having helped to build their confidence to engage with a group activity. Similarly, there was evidence of young people engaging with Plus One and then being referred to creative mentors. Similar patterns were apparent with other partners who also sometimes deliver different programmes that young people may benefit from.

## 5.4 RESOURCES CONSTRAINTS

While all partners and carers were generally positive about Plus One and we note above the role of creative working to overcome the challenges posed by resource constraints these were still problematic. This meant that organisational aspects of the programme sometimes drew comments from respondents. Some respondents thought that earlier notification of dates or clearer forward

communication of when activities would be happening would be beneficial for partnership working and for engaging young people. Even while such comments were made, the role of resource constraints was acknowledged. For example, one partner had wanted clear information about what would be available in six months time, but project staff could not provide this because funding was not in place to cover that period. The recent agreement of three years of sustained funding will help with this, but it is clearly the case that confirmed ongoing funding is central to sustaining partnership working and the sorts of ongoing relationship building that is central to the programme.

## 5.5 CARER EXPERIENCES

Carers were also engaged with the research. These interviews were by far the shortest. They appreciated the Plus One scheme as a holiday distraction for young people and they valued the time off that they received while young people were engaged. They spoke of their general support for the scheme and offered positive views of the caring ethos of the project staff and the attempt to personalise activities to reflect the interests of individual young people. In the frequent cases where young people had engaged with Plus One on multiple occasions there was evidence of a close relationship between carers and project staff and there was clearly two-way information flow about the way that individual young people were feeling over time. In one case we interviewed a carer who was new to Plus One and she also seemed to welcome the information flow and attempt to personalise delivery. The young person in question here was very unsure of attending on this occasion and it was possible to observe efforts in the engagement between project staff and the carer to support her to engage and enjoy the experience.

The most prominent response from carers was that they brought the young people to Plus One because they enjoyed the experience and

felt that it was a safe and caring space for the young people to experience. In this regard, like project staff, they were supporting the agency of young people themselves. However, when prompted carers did also recognise longer-term motivations related to the employability theory of change. They mentioned that they thought that the scheme helped to build confidence and helped young people to expand their social networks and to develop particular skills related to communication, public speaking and creativity.

## 5.6 OBSERVATION DATA

The research team undertook eight days of observation of Plus One activities. The time spent in the holiday clubs allowed the team to build relationships with the young people involved and to observe both the activities and the relationships between project staff and young people and between the young people themselves. We purposefully did not though seek to collect data from the participants while undertaking these observations and have not included here any reflections on the inevitable conversations and interactions that the research team had with young people during this phase of the research.

From this time it is possible to reflect on several aspects of the activities we observed. First, this is an exciting and hugely creative experience. We took part in multiple art forms from drama based games, story writing and telling, character development, poetry, acting, singing and dancing, film making, music production and illustration. All members of the research team who participated enjoyed the experience of participation and commented on the 'action packed' nature of it. Second, it was clear that there were strong and caring relationships between young people involved in the project and between them and project staff. These relationships had been sustained over a long period. We observed the sessions over an eight month period and many of the young people involved returned for multiple sessions



and were already involved in these ongoing relationships when we began the observations.

A fourth noteworthy observation was that the subject content of Plus One activities very frequently draw on experiences and reflections on being in care. In particular, they drew on experiences of moving into the care system, of changes in care placement and loss or disruption of family relationships. A final reflection from observations flowed from this. The research team felt that this topic matter involved inherent risks. These included risks in the relationships between young people, of triggering negative emotional responses and also of disclosure of the potential for self-harm and also negative or abusive experiences. This was something researchers discussed in the post-session debriefs with the team, where there is no intention of the art method as a therapeutic intervention and without the resource or follow-up care for it to be so, the research team questioned whether the young people would have the same experience if the content had not been focused around stories of care. Although the content was driven by the young people, the research team felt that the initial seeds of the stories were posed in a way which would encourage reactivity, that is the responses from young people may have been based on what they thought was required. An example of this is through leading questions... “so is the main character in care?” Additionally, the requirements of the funding bodies could influence the direction of the stories which meant that young people had limits in which to work.

This could be interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, it may well be rare for these young people to have such a question posed to them in other settings – such as school drama or story telling exercises. In this sense, the emphasis of Plus One can be interpreted as one of legitimating the idea of having a leading character with a care background and therefore demonstrating that it is a ‘safe space’ for such experiences to be explored and normalising the

idea of care experienced young people being the focus of creative and audience attention. This is in alignment with the emancipatory underpinnings of participatory theatre techniques (see Section 3.5). This is an area where further research would help to unpick the relative benefits and risks associated with a creative focus on care.

### Young people's responses

Responses from young people came through direct interviews, through a focus group discussion with older participants who were care leavers who had experience of Plus One, reflecting on a film that they had made (‘Changes’), with scenes from the film used to generate discussion and through a short workshop activity with participants across a range of ages, including some of the younger participants where they were asked to sum up their experience of Plus One in a few words or a short phrase. The research team also had access to some video recorded interviews that a small number of young people produced as part of the ‘Culture Cares Symposium’ in October 2018, to disseminate their reflections on being involved in Plus One. Finally, the presentation the research team developed from this data was relayed back to a group of Plus One participants who helped then to confirm or challenge our interpretations of the data we had collected from them. The research team felt that this was an important step in the analysis, helped to give ownership and voice to the young people themselves and was in line with both the values underpinning the Plus One project and the themes in the data collected from the young people themselves. Areas where the participants asked for changes in interpretation or added to the analysis at this final stage are noted in the discussion.

The short workshop discussion elicited a series of themes and reflections. The Figure below shows a word cloud from the data collected. Three broad and emergent themes might be said to arise from this exercise. The first relates to a clear sense that Plus One provides

a comfortable, welcoming and safe space in which friendships and positive relationships can develop. The second is that Plus One helps participants to develop skills, confidence, especially in relation to communication, and self-awareness. Finally, a third, if less prominent theme, is related to longer term educational and career opportunities.

Figure 1: Word cloud of participant ‘one word/phrase’ reflections on Plus One



These relatively superficial themes were augmented by the deeper data collection from interviews and photo-elicitation.

## 5.6.1 CARING RELATIONSHIPS, SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

The first theme to come out of this work was that participants overwhelmingly regarded Plus One as providing a caring, supportive and positive environment. For some this was very much couched in the context of a positive experience of a relatively shallow holiday club activity. However, there were several others – especially older participants who had engaged with the scheme for a long period, including over the course of several years – where this extended to a more profound experience. Several of these participants spoke of the scheme using words such as friends and family. They contrasted this caring environment positively with those provided by the formal care system. As the quotes from two different care leavers below illustrate, this was very

much valued and had multiple elements to it. They identify the environment as positive because they personally felt valued and welcome, but also because it facilitated long-term and sustained positive relationships, with both project staff and with other participants:

“it has created a little family, when you are in the care system, when they say a safe environment it is a lot different to what Plus One sees it as, our safe environment; we are able to have laughs about it and one to one discussions and things like that.”

Johnny, Care Leaver.

“I just feel like I can be myself... I know that if I ever need to talk to anyone or need anything Plus One members and you as well, I know for a fact if I ever need anything I have got you guys”

Simon, Care Leaver.

What doesn't come through these quotations though is the mutuality in caring relationships between young people and project staff. This is not a one way relationship of professionalised care. It was clear from talking to the young people involved that there were positive and caring affection from the young people themselves toward project staff. These were seen as human relationships as well as professional relationships.

The caring relationships also extended to the outputs that the young people were making and the importance of the content and its potential impact. Consideration over what was developed was discussed in relation to avoiding the reinforcement of negative stereotypes on the group but also in informing younger people in care about the possibilities of the future as a care-leaver without distressing them nor creating false hope or expectations:

“I've got this fear of telling 12-13 year olds in care of what it's like leaving care because I'm scared that if I tell them they're going to run off crying and flee to Australia. I always have

**this fear of how you get across to young kids of what it's like, because they need to be prepared for it but you don't want to scare the living daylights out of them. "**

Sarah, Care Leaver.

The second prominent theme is that older participants in Plus One clearly viewed this experience as shaping their educational decision making and confidence. This was expressed both in relation to specific experiences of activities that were directly related to the interests of the young people for the future and more generally. For example, specifically one young person commented:

**"[I have] ... Developed range of skills: it's given me the ideas of how to take it further, we have done production, camera work, music, dancing, acting, and it is all things I want to get involved with and meet other people as well to make friends and stuff."**

Jennifer, Care Leaver

This young person wanted to go onto a career in performance arts and was now on an FE course related to this aspiration, which she directly attributed to gaining experience and confidence from participation in Plus One. For her, Plus One had helped with emotional and mental health barriers. The particular contribution of the experience was both in relation to having confidence building experiences but also the camaraderie and caring relationships she had developed through the scheme.

Another young person who had left care commented on the role that Plus One had played in helping her to progress to a University Law Degree. At least part of her interest in the law had been generated by her own feelings of disenfranchisement in the face of legal procedures but also Plus One had helped her to develop her own intrinsic confidence and voice. She wanted to assert that this was her own character that was coming through, rather than a response to any exogenous influence but at

the same time she had clearly again valued both the experiences that Plus One provided and the relationships she had developed through the scheme.

The types of skills that participants reported they had developed through participation in Plus One varied from young person to young person. These included some technical skills in relation to acting, singing or film making for instance, but more widely reported skills development related to softer and more generic skills and aptitudes. Increases in confidence in public speaking for example was widely reported. An interesting area of skills development related to negotiation and dealing with conflict. This related to discussions of artistic content and presentational decisions in the making of art work, where participants reported that they had to balance competing views, reconcile difference and also older participants reflected to some extent on the challenge of incorporating the views of younger participants who may have been less confident in expressing their views. In a discussion with two older participants on the experience of dealing with creative tensions, they reported that:

**"The hardest thing is because Plus One is such a big success, and it is – you've got so many young people and everybody's care story is very different. So it gets wild, insanely wild, we end up with a ginormous story and it doesn't really go anywhere and I think this is crap why do we do it but it always turns out to work quite well. I think we all have to sit down and it's quite hard to do actually and get a basic story. A very, very basic care story that we want to portray. That's when we were eliminating scenes...."**

Jennifer, Care Leaver

**"...It's really difficult at the start of it, eliminating scenes, int it? Because you don't want to upset people by like feeling like you've pushed their part out but just trying**

**to explain to them we just need a broader overview of care."**

Sarah, Care Leaver

This is something that the young people concerned really valued and related to the development of emotional control, maturity and empathy. While it may obviously be the case that young people themselves overstate the extent to which they had included others, this was something that was clearly present when the research team observed Plus One activities. The team did witness frequent examples of less confident participants being granted space (both by Plus One staff and other participants) to express themselves and minority views being given full consideration and clearly being valued. This was very much part of participants themselves buying into the ethos and structure of the activities.

Another young man also spoke about Plus One having given him confidence to pursue career opportunities and had left care for an apprenticeship in the local authority. While his work aspirations did not directly involve creative or artistic skills development, he nevertheless clearly felt that the experience of Plus One had been hugely beneficial in helping him make the transition from full time education to work. He spoke about this involving a double transition from education to work and from the care system to independent living. He felt that the Plus One experience had helped him to develop supportive peer relationships that helped to broker this double transition.

**"It has also helped planning for when leaving care, and hearing other people's experiences as well, people who were older and already through the care leaving system and allowed me to get a lot more of an understanding of what changes were coming up as well..."**

John, Plus One participant.

Another slightly older care leaver echoed this sentiment about the supportive and caring nature of the relationships he had developed

via Plus One and the effect this had had on his confidence.

**"I just feel like I can be myself... I know that if I ever need to talk to anyone or need anything Plus One members and you as well, I know for a fact if I ever need anything I have got you guys"**

John, Plus One participant.

These experiences of mutual care for one another raises the issue of cohort construction for programmes like Plus One. Plus One is targeted specifically at young people with a care experience, though inevitably this still involves diverse experiences; with some participants being in foster care, others having been subsequently adopted and others being care leavers, or experiencing respite care. We asked young people about this and received mixed responses. Some felt that they would be happy if the cohort was broadened as they felt that others could benefit from the Plus One experience. However, others felt that there was something beneficial arising from the partially shared experience of care in the cohort. They thought that Plus One gave them a rare opportunity to discuss and make sense of the experience of care, with others that understood what this might be like. Care leavers were particularly keen on this and spoke about how it was also valuable to share and rationalise the experience of leaving care; something they felt that other young people without this experience might struggle with:

**"I don't mind if you do [invite people without care experience], but for me personally, it's like I don't ever do that. So you know how in this space, automatically, we have all said things about care, and to be honest, it's been the centre of the conversation, this would never happen anywhere else though for us guys because you're either sat on your own in your flat or at college where you don't talk about it ..."**

Sarah, Plus One Participant.



...Yeah because we've all got to know each other so well. We come in and straight away I'm like Hi. We can say anything, I can say to you guys oh my god, I've got 70p in my account and I am bugged this week and I know you guys are gonna be like oh god, same. If I went up to some of my mates who live in like a four-bedroom house with their parents and go out shopping every week with £50 they would laugh in my face and be like what the hell are you going on about? So it's nice to come here and say little things that maybe other people, even who are disadvantaged but not care specific, wouldn't get. And I don't feel there's another space for that, so that's the only reason why I would say I don't feel [it is a good idea to include young people with different or non-care experiences]." Jennifer, Plus One Participant.

Partners also commented on the shared experiences of participants. Partners generally supported this. One partner thought this was central to engaging some of the hardest to help young people:

**"...the young person gravitating into the [Plus One] group and actually yes that group do have the care experience in common, they share it, it is a powerful, safe place, and we often get young people saying 'so everybody here is in care?' You say 'yeah' and they go 'its not just me' and it's the side of the coin, you know, that sort of sense that its only me having that experience."**

Simon, Plus One Participant.

Another partner again provided support for the general model, but also suggested that young people experiencing other forms of social exclusion may also benefit from the types of experience that Plus One facilitates:

**"there's a lot of young people out in the community that aren't in the care system that actually would benefit from this and actually probably have less opportunities than some of our children"**

Plus One Partner.

## 5.6.2 UNDERSTANDING SELF THROUGH ART

Some participants suggested that one of the benefits of Plus One is that artistic and creative practice allows them to explore their own experiences. Here the creative focus on the care experience is significant. Observing Plus One activities clearly showed that young people were able and encouraged to share their reflections on care experiences, often via the narrative of stories that the group create. Young people often discuss how they think characters in these stories might feel and the reasons behind their behaviour. Some young people commented to us in interviews and group discussion that they felt this was valuable, and also recognised that this may be valuable for other participants

**"...You know, because you often are like amazing acting, I'm sure we're all great but [name deleted] is like fab. Noticeably fab. Do you get anything out of acting the roles? Because I know you are nervous and obviously take on the roles really well. Do you feel like you get anything out of it after the role? ..."**

Sarah, Plus One Participant

**"...Definitely learned from some of the things in the role like if I'm reading a character out and they feel like I feel deep inside ..."**

Eve, Plus One Participant

**"...Also it moves away from like you know we were talking about kind of your experiences and how that can sometimes influence the stories that we tell. We're doing this through the eyes of Sam that was our character, that wasn't you, even though you're putting your experience into that to kind of help build that character but we're taking one step removed from you."**

Jennifer, Plus One Participant.

Some artistic practitioners involved in the programme clearly felt that this was beneficial.

At the same time though, they often also commented that 'this is not therapy'. This is a point of both strength and potential risk in the programme. Since it clearly is not therapy, there is a risk in encouraging the young people to focus on experiences that might resonate with their own and be troubling. Plus One project staff were aware of this and discussed mechanisms for managing these risks and this was often a feature of debriefing sessions. As the programme has evolved, a trained art therapist has been brought into the team to support activities with young people, and the research team welcomed this development, as a means of managing the inherent risks involved in the process. This is one of the aspects of the programme where a definite difference in professional culture between the creative and artistic sector and the formal care sector. By comparison, it seemed that the creative professionals in the arts were much more willing to take risks in pursuit of benefits than were care professionals who we consulted as part of the research. They also emphasised that they thought that the ongoing caring relationships facilitated by Plus One and the wider partnership were central to risk management:

**"The risk, you've got to mitigate the risk against the benefits for the young person really, because if you didn't risk they wouldn't make any progress sometimes... you've got to measure the risk... it lessens the risk if the relationship is already there..."**

Artistic Practitioner from Partner organisation.

We were unable to judge either of these perspectives as being better informed, but the rival 'cultures of care' were certainly noticeable.

## 5.6.3 CHALLENGING THE CARE SYSTEM

A strong theme throughout the fieldwork and in relation to art work produced by young

people was to challenge the formal care system and wider society in some way. This started with working through the experience of care, as above. But in the sense that art was produced sometimes for a public audience, this also had the purpose of raising awareness of what the experience of care feels like for young people in that circumstance. When we showed young people one of their films as a means of eliciting responses from them, they commented that

**"... it was very professional, it was proper job wasn't it? It was very good, like [name deleted] said.... Your bit was honestly fab, it was really, really good and got his point across very well because of how professional it came across. It wasn't just some phone recording of us guys messing around. It was a really professional well put across, well put together job."**

Sarah, Plus One Participant.

In unpacking this aspect of the findings, the first point to note is that when asked about the outputs from their work, young people were clearly proud of what they had made. This was something that Plus One project staff also emphasised; that the quality of art work produced was of central importance to the integrity of the project.

Secondly, and following from this first point, participants placed a great deal of importance on the extent to which they were able to be in control of the creative process. Young people and practitioners involved in Plus One spoke of previous experiences of where artists had not always devolved full control to young people in negative terms and contrasted this with what they clearly felt was the most common experience of being placed in control of the artistic process.

**"Yeah and that was just a one-off example, there were quite a few bits where we had discussions about everything didn't we? It took us hours just to describe what looked like the most pointless bits in the film had**



**very interesting conversations about them. But it was nice because that meant everyone got a chance to shape it and it wasn't just a worker going right let's involve drugs in this, well no we don't want that. So it was nice to have that and it was definitely lead by us I think."**

Young people controlling the process was a key claim made by project staff and this was again something that observations of Plus One activities partially confirmed. But this was also an area where the research team felt that practitioners were dealing creatively with multiple cross cutting pressures. Piecemeal and short-term funding often came with particular themes attached to it; such as crime reduction/deviation and employability and educational aspiration. Here project staff worked hard to reconcile an externally imposed theme with the interests and ownership of the participants themselves. An example here is the 'Changes' film made with a crime theme and supported by funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner. While the turning point of the film hinged on a burglary, the story itself reflected the explicit desire of participants avoid depicting young people in care as criminals.

**"We spoke about shifting perceptions so about, in fact I spoke about you, so you might have to elaborate on that. You know when we spoke initially during production about the kid in care getting into drugs and you stood up and said no I don't want that, I'm sick of kids in care being perceived as going straight into drugs so we spoke about that and about how the perception you weren't happy with. It creating this, so you don't want to be perpetuating the perceptions. ..."**

Jennifer, Plus One Participant.

**"...we don't talk like that, we didn't act like that and it was quite offensive really, I was just having none of it. You know, we're not all on drugs, we all don't swear we all don't have that type of attitude."**

Sarah, Plus One Participant.

The film narrative itself then placed emphasis on the way that other young people had drawn a young person experiencing a moment of crisis associated with a change in care placement into a criminal activity which they were not fully aware of. The narrative is powerful and clearly intended to challenge stereotypes about why care leavers might be over-represented as offenders in the criminal justice system; exploring the context and reasons why young people in care may become offenders through no fault of their own. This is a good example of how the art produced is politicised and involves an ethic of justice and also how it reflects cross cutting objectives from external funders and the Plus One Community themselves.

The art produced was also very frequently consciously constructed as a challenge to the structure and operation of the care system. The example cited above contains a powerful depiction of the alienation that some young people experience in the form of professionally bureaucratised relationships. Key scenes in the film explore a loss of control when a young person is effectively locked in the back seat of a car with child locks on. The participants explained that being in the back seat and having child locks on – presumably a safeguarding procedure – made them feel infantilised and out of control. The car journey depicted was related to a change of care placement and proceeds with the front passenger seat occupied by a bulky file, presumably with the life story of the young person represented in the words of others. The journey ends with a faceless social worker presenting the file and a narrative to the new foster carers while the young person is locked in the back of the car. The young people explained that the narrative was intended to represent a damaging lack of control over their own lives and relationships in this context.

Other art work produced via Plus One also contested similar aspects of the care experience, with disrupted relationships and

changes of placement being common themes. Another theme is that caring relationships are diminished by bureaucratic context in which social work and formal care provision are delivered. In one story and associated art work, a new care placement is depicted as a strange and dangerous world, in which the young person must navigate between dangers and risks, initially without the support of others.

A central element of the Plus One programme is that the art produced is frequently intended to be for dissemination. In several dissemination events, the audience has been made up partly of professionals in the care system and several of the older participants clearly hoped that the dissemination of their work would contribute to changing the system. For example, the Changes film discussed above was shown to an invited audience at a private screening. In a group discussion several of the young people reflected on being present at this screening:

**"... the audience who were mainly care workers, after care workers and I just said about their discomfort because there was quite a lot of discomfort when we were showing it. They were at points very uncomfortable I think..."**

Sarah, Plus One Participant.

**"...And that was a big. A little bit. A lot of apologies afterwards..."**

Jennifer, Plus One Participant.

**"...it [care] can lose, personal touch, is that the right word? You can completely lose your identity because to some workers you are, not everyone, but to a lot of them, with really high case load, you're a piece of paper effectively and it's not about them being nasty or not being nice or not being good at their jobs, it's just that they've got that many, you are a piece of paper, they read your file, oh right, da da da and then they read another file..."**

Sarah, Plus One Participant.

**"...For me personally, I had a lot of people**

**coming up to me and say we're so apologetic for the way this had been perceived and they were upset, I think it had hit home..."**

Simon, Plus One Participant.

In another interview a young person spoke about what they thought was an important general aspect of the Plus One experience:

**"Kids in care aren't just like pieces of paper we are still human beings at the end of the day, and we need them to realise that we still struggle at the end of the day and we need more than just a handshake... we need more than that"**

John, Plus One Participant.

Despite these clearly critical commentaries, these same young people also recognised that some of the elements of the care system that they wanted to contest were about institutionalised contexts as opposed to the social workers and carers themselves. They recognised that individuals worked within resource and case load constraints and some of what they represented in critical terms was related to systems and structures as opposed to individual agency.

On this point though a smaller number of respondents did suggest that focussing on care experiences as part of the content of the Plus One activities might be problematic in that the subject is too complex to be dealt with adequately inside relatively short duration holiday activities. This was a minority view but given the small numbers of respondents, it remains an important contribution; and shapes some of the recommendations at the end of this report.

## 5.7 ARTISTIC DISSEMINATION AND IMPACT

During the period of research there were two dissemination events related to the work of Plus One. The first was a screening of a film

made by Plus One to an invited audience at the Quad Cinema. The audience for this event was made up of carers, care workers, social workers and other care professionals associated with the Derby and Derbyshire Virtual Schools and also other adults invited by the young people themselves.

The second was the major Culture Cares Symposium held at Derby Theatre in October 2018. This began with an adapted (adapted and performed by Plus One participants) performance of Curious Monkey's Leaving by Paddy Campbell – in this format renamed as 'I am Sam'. This was followed by presentations from the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the research team to disseminate the initial findings from the project. Lunchtime performances included songs from care leavers who had previously participated in Plus One and a demonstration of Curious Monkey's Virtual Reality performance of the experience of frequently changing relationships with

social workers and care placements, and the experience leaving care. In the afternoon there, was a keynote presentation/performance from Lemn Sissay, a series of workshops, a plenary presentation by Darren Henley (Chief Executive of the Arts Council) and a final Question and Answer session, including young people with care experience.

At this, the interim headline research findings were presented in plenary session and the audience were invited to provide feedback on what they had seen and heard that morning on a 'luggage tag' which followed the theme of using luggage artistically as a symbol of the impermanence of care placements. This feedback allowed us to gauge the wider impact of Plus One and our research findings on an interested audience which included representatives of arts and creative organisations and care professionals. The following is a summary of the findings from this exercise and the event evaluation.

**Figure 2: Culture Cares Symposium**

**9.45am – 10.20am:** Registration

**10.30am:** Official Welcome

**10.45 – 11.45am:** opening curtain raiser performed by Care Leavers followed by a short extract performance of Leaving by Curious Monkey.

**11.45am – 12.00pm:** Giles Dilnot – Director of Communications and External Affairs for the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England. Giles (former BBC broadcaster) will be presenting a walkthrough of a brand new national website they have created for children in care and care leavers and their vision for the Children's Commissioner Office.

**12.00 – 12.30pm:** University of Derby Research Impact Presentation – Presented by Alex Nunn, Professor of Global Political Economy & Dr Tamsin Bowers-Brown, lead in Learning, Teaching and Student experience.

**12.30 – 1.30pm:** Lunch – alongside live performances by young people.

**1.30– 2.30pm:** Lemn Sissay – keynote speech followed by spoken word performance: "An adults perspective looking back and why it's vital we start to listen to these young people's voices and integrate them into the mainstream." Followed by Q&A.

**2.30 – 4.00pm:** Break-Out Sessions

**4.00 – 4.15pm:** Chief Executive from Arts Council England, Darren Henley OBE.

**4.15 – 4.50pm:** Panel Discussion with members of the conference followed by response and Q&A.

**4.50pm:** Creative response piece 5 minutes by Young People

The arts and performance displayed on the day reflected a strong ethic of justice. The experience of young people in care and leaving care was represented emotively as one of frequent changes in social worker and care placement, of being dehumanised by bureaucratic practice and let down in the experience of a cliff edge in support at the point of leaving care. These experiences were quite clearly relayed with the intention of challenging the care system, and wider society, and to change both to have a stronger ethic of care. This was the subject of the performance of Leaving and the Virtual Reality simulation of the experience of shifting care placements, bureaucratised and short-term social work support and the financial and emotional poverty of leaving care for many young people. Lemn Sissay's presentation focussed on the need for a deeper ethic of affective care in the formal care system, and challenged wider society to take seriously its caring obligations, through our collective institutions and outside them.

Overall, around 120 people attended the event with 30 of these completing the full event evaluation form at the end of the day. Respondents rated the speakers in the programme as 4.8 out of 5, the event overall as 4.7 out of 5 and the afternoon workshops 4.3 out of 5. Qualitative comments were universally positive; the conference attendees commented that the event had met their prior expectations, that they were inspired to work harder or more in collaboration with arts organisations to support vulnerable groups and looked after children, with many saying that they would recommend attendance at future such events, unprompted. Participants said they were more aware of the lived experience of being in care and the challenges of leaving care and were more empathetic to this group as a result. This suggested very positive intentions from both the arts and care sectors to work together more in the future.

Audience responses to the research findings

suggested even stronger support from the audience for Plus One and for art-based interventions with children and young people with care experience. Thirty two participants completed a qualitative luggage tag about the research. The vast majority of respondents suggested that they would change their practice as a consequence of what they had heard. The very small number who did not indicate this suggested that they would sustain their work with Looked After Children. The next most prominent theme was that participants felt that they had learned more about the experience of young people in care and leaving care. Specific changes of practice in relation to professional care services included (in order of prominence of responses) increased partnership working, strengthening their organisations' focus on creativity or incorporating the arts, attempting to lower case loads and increase young people's ownership of their own care planning, ensuring that services reflected a stronger ethic of care. Participants from the arts also focussed strongly on increases in partnership working but four respondents suggested they wanted to establish a scheme similar to Plus One and learning from the evidence that they had heard. We also received comments from one individual who had been motivated to volunteer in a personal capacity in arts interventions for children and young people with a care experience and another who suggested that they would now apply to become a foster carer.

Overall, it seemed that the ethic of justice represented in the arts disseminated and also the presentations from young people themselves had a strong impact on the audience in ways that suggested it was effective in at least shifting intentions to strengthen the ethic of care in professional practice. This was either through expanding arts provision to children and young people with a care experience or through changing professional social work practice.



# 5 | CONCLUSIONS

## 6.1 IMPACT ON THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Research Question 1 focussed on the impacts on young people as expressed in the programme documentation, which is itself largely shaped by funders. Research Question 4 relates to this in focussing on how third parties view the impact on young people. Plus One has multiple aims in terms of the impact on the young people who participate in it. The formal objectives relate to skills, confidence, educational and career aspirations (including in relation to the arts) and promoting social change. These are all outcomes that are difficult to measure in the sense that the specific impact of this programme is difficult to isolate from other influences on the young people and because such impacts are often only realised over a much longer timeframe. The scale of the interventions in relation to some young people will also be relatively minor (participation in a 2–3 days worth of holiday activities) and as such defining the impact of this programme relative to other influences is likely to be even more difficult. It is also not possible to compare the experiences of those who participate in this programme relative to others who might be thought a pure control group. With those caveats in place, on the basis of the data we have collected it would be very difficult to conclude that participation in the programme did not support in some way, and proportional to the scale and scope of the programme, the sorts of impact envisaged.

Young people who participate in the programme practice a variety of skills such as acting, public speaking, singing and music creation, illustration and story writing. Group

activities also support more generic skills development such as creativity, negotiation, communication and listening skills and empathy for others. While it is not possible on the basis of this participation and the methods available to us to quantify the extent to which these skills are developed, on the balance of probability they will have developed to some extent. The programme has relatively small numbers of participants in any one set of activities and a high ratio of adult support from professional artists who are very attentive to supporting individuals to extend their development from their own specific starting points. The programme is immersive and offers peer support also. Both young people and their carers report that they think the programme helps the development of the specific skills reported above, and some respondents were able to cite specific examples of this. As such, we conclude that the programme is successful in developing these skills.

The mix of activities and the skills development suggested above are also likely to impact positively on confidence. There were incidences where there were visible improvements in confidence for individual young people during the sessions we observed and our respondents reported that they felt that programme participation increased their confidence over time. This was supported by carers and artistic professionals engaged in the programme also suggested that they witnessed this with individual young people. Again, while it is not possible to quantify the extent of this, we are therefore able to conclude that the programme is successful in improving the confidence of those young people who attend, and this is likely to be particularly the case where young people sustain attendance over a period of

time and become involved in public performances and dissemination.

In terms of educational and career aspirations generally and in relation to the arts in particular, the evidence is mixed on the basis of the diversity of programme participants. For some of the younger children it is difficult to conclude that the programme has a measurable effect on aspiration in this sense, merely because they are so far from making key decisions that are central to career trajectory. For these young children though, the impacts of the programme in relation to skills development and confidence are likely to be positive for educational and careers aspirations, and they certainly experience increased exposure to artistic professionals which will have increased their understanding of the potential for artistic careers if this was lacking. For older participants there was clear evidence that programme participation had impacted positively on educational or careers aspirations. Several care leavers specifically reported that programme participation had helped to inform their educational decisions to choose specific courses or to have the confidence to pursue these. In one case the course was specifically related to the participant's desire for a career in performing arts and this had itself been influenced by participation on the programme. Another young person reported that they had been helped to access an apprenticeship. One other young people had progressed to an apprenticeship at the Theatre and was involved in working on the management of the Plus One and other similar schemes. Yet another young person had been supported to gain work experience working in front of house roles at the Theatre. Two further Plus One participants had gained an unpaid performer role in an upcoming mainstage production at the Theatre.

Following from this, Research Question 3 focussed on the ways that young people experience the programme which might be broader or different to the impact the programme has on them in terms of skills, confidence and career aspiration. This research question was specifically focussed on higher education (HE) and other aspects of the experience which we may not initially have anticipated. All participants had experienced working with artistic professionals and some had experienced university visits, working with HE students and story making related to positive images of educational progression. As with the previous discussion of aspiration it is necessary to differentiate between older and younger participants. Younger participants will have become more familiar with HE as a potential future opportunity, while older participants reflected more explicitly on the way that the programme had raised their awareness of HE provision and confidence that University was 'for people like them'. Two of our respondents specifically spoke of how participation had made them more likely to apply to University and one was about to take up a place. Again, therefore, we are able to conclude that programme participation is likely to have a positive impact on educational and career aspiration. Indeed, in this regard, the research itself may have contributed to these outcomes in that participants became familiar with the research team as academic staff and discussed student life with researchers.



## 6.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAMME PARTICIPATION

Research Question 5 focussed on the factors which might affect programme participation. Several stakeholders discussed such factors. These included changes of placement, the willingness of carers to bring young people to activities and fragile emotional states which might prevent participation. In the evidence we collected this all came from stakeholders and partners rather than from carers and young people themselves. Mainly this is a selection issue – we accessed respondents who were participating in the programme and who were therefore less likely to be affected by these barriers. That said, we did observe some of these challenges in relation to young people who were new to the programme and some respondents suggested that they had become more confident over time but were nervous or hesitant to attend in the first instance.

To the extent that any of this is relevant to programme participation – which we judge likely but do not have hard evidence on – there are aspects of the way that Plus One is delivered that may already help with these challenges and might be expanded in the future. A key element of Plus One is the extent to which central programme staff attempt to build relationships with carers as a means of supporting the young people. It may be that there is scope to take this one step further where new starters are involved as the programme develops and expands with the new funding agreed in October 2019. For instance, there may be scope to organise induction tasters where carers and new starters engage on a shorter duration prior to attending the main activities where they would meet more experienced participants. This may help to overcome any sense that other participants already know each other and might also help carers to better understand the nature of activities that young people will experience and potentially also to benefit from

some of the positive impacts of the programme in relation to artistic and creative awareness, for example.

## 6.3 CREATIVE CULTURES OF CARE AND JUSTICE

Research Question 2 focussed on the ways that those engaged in the programme conceived its objectives and the theory of change underpinning it. The evidence revealed that this is a highly complex question, and that there were multiple answers to it, with individuals often subscribing to multiple and often competing objectives which arose from multiple sources. Core staff associated with Plus One showed incredible creativity not just in their artistic and pedagogical work with young people but also in the way that they negotiated and held multiple objectives in creative tension. They certainly responded to and acted upon the exogenous objectives and theories of change embodied in funder targets and outputs. Project staff spoke about their aims to increase employability, to develop young peoples' skills and aspirations. They focussed on raising awareness of artistic and creative careers and educational opportunities. They spoke directly to young people about their long-term objectives in relation to education and careers and had strong knowledge of these on an individual participant basis. There were examples of young people being supported with realising these ambitions outside of the direct Plus One experience; with referrals to additional opportunities for skills development or work experience.

However, they also recognised the limitations in the 'employability' theory of change discussed in Section 4. Project staff recognised the tensions in their motives help participants progress as individuals within the power structures of society at the same time as challenging the inequities of these structures. They also worked to maintain the values of artistic endeavour in and for its own sake, aside

from instrumental objectives of promoting careers awareness. Finally, they showed considerable commitment to recognising and acting on the motivations of young people themselves, whose objectives were often much less grandiose or instrumental. Project staff were keen to give space to individuals to use the programme for their own developmental needs and to recognise the simple desire just to have fun. Project staff and partner artists showed significant tenacity in being able to hold these competing, and sometimes conflicting, objectives in a positive creative tension with one another.

One important way in which they achieved this picked up on one of the debates in the academic literature on looked after children in recent years. This is the debate about ethics of care and justice. Some have argued that these two different ethical commitments are difficult to pursue at the same time. The findings here suggest that Plus One does pursue these two different ethical commitments simultaneously and with some success. This might be thought of as a difference between an internal ethic and an external ethic. Internally, there was considerable evidence of an ethic of care. Again, this ethic of care reflects the feminist literature on care as a mutual relationship between the young people themselves and a two way relationship between adults and young people. Project staff clearly and successfully tried to create an environment in which young people respected each other and developed mutually caring relationships. Older participants in particular demonstrated and reflected on this, talking of the relationships within the Plus One group as being like a 'family'. Similarly, there was clear evidence of project staff valuing and caring for the young people who participated in Plus One, knowing far more about their lives and supporting them in ways that went way beyond their participation in a series of arts workshops. This was not a one-way relationship either; many of the young people involved clearly demonstrated that they cared about the adults involved in the

programme, especially those with an ongoing role. This was again another meaning of the concept of creativity involved in Plus One – the creativity in establishing and maintaining this internal ethic of care.

Externally however, Plus One faces the rest of society through the art-work produced collaboratively by artists and young people. This is not always easy to isolate as purely a Plus One creation because there are frequent cross-overs with other artistic programmes and supportive interventions, such as creative mentoring, operated via the Derbyshire Virtual School. Here it is especially older participants and those who have engaged with the programme for longer who take part. The art work produced, performances and dissemination has a clear ethical commitment to justice. It seeks to raise awareness of the challenges and stigma that young people with a care experience themselves draw attention to. It seeks to challenge the care system and wider society to tackle these and the structural disadvantages that young people with care experience demonstratively face.

In this way, Plus One exhibits and explicitly cultivates a rival culture of care from that which it depicts in the formal care system. Whether rightly or wrongly, these involve shifting, impermanent, bureaucratised and instrumental relationships, risk-averse and impersonal relationships, bound up in ambiguous concepts such as 'corporate parenting' and 'institutional care'. This depiction of the formal care system comes substantially from some of the young people involved in Plus One, and reflects their own experiences, though it should be noted that it is a system and institutional critique rather than being levelled at individual social workers or care workers within the system. Regardless, this is where Plus One's external ethic of justice seeks to challenge and question the very meaning of 'care' itself. Looking at the audience data reported in Section 5.7 it appears as if this external ethic is effective at supporting the wider development and

dissemination of the internal ethic of care. Put simply; Plus One successfully integrates an ethic of care with an ethic of justice.

## 6.4 CONTINGENT COPING: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS FOR THE ARTS SECTOR

The research did not set out to focus on the ways that programmes like Plus One might impact upon the care or on the arts sector. However, the findings do raise interesting questions in relation to both. There is clearly a great deal of interest in the role that non-statutory providers might play in supporting vulnerable groups. This is particularly the case in a context of ongoing pressures on public funding. On the one hand there is pressure on school funding and institutional pressure on educational performance indicators which generates knock-on pressures on school inclusions. Similarly, social work budgets are under pressure. Both of these dynamics strengthen the incentives in statutory services to find non-traditional service providers, especially for vulnerable groups. Similarly, the increased pressure to raise educational attainment for Looked After Children in particular also strengthens the incentives for local authorities to find additional activities for this group. On the other hand, arts and creative organisations and professionals are always looking for additional funding and ongoing initiatives in arts funding stress the importance of the social function of arts practice and the need to reach out to groups that are traditionally under-represented in the sector. There is concern in the arts sector that austerity pressure will cause even greater constraints on arts funding an that necessitates that arts organisations "rethink fundamental elements of their business model" (Armstrong et al., 2018).

This creates significant mutual opportunities for collaborative working, transfer of knowledge and good practice and the generation of

additionality. At the moment the research we undertook on Plus One appeared to fit this picture of additionality. However, there are also risks associated with such models, especially in the context of welfare state retrenchment. These include the replacement of statutory educational or social work provision with alternative provision and on the other hand the loss of integrity or focus in the arts and creative sectors who run the risk of being drawn into replacement education or social work provision. It is easy to see how cross-pressured local authority and school professionals working under very tight financial arrangements might see the arts as a means of satisfying minimum educational provision standards and coping with their context and trying to maintain provision for vulnerable groups. While this may be contingently appropriate for individual young people, there is a risk of further exacerbating inequalities in access to the full range of provision. Equally, the inherent value of the arts may be challenged if it is overtaken by the instrumental objectives of delivering replacement activities for statutory services. Our research did not reveal these risks to be realised, but it remains important to ensure that any learning from the Plus One experience maintains this important caveat – that Plus One is effective in part because it is an additional rather than alternative intervention.

Similarly, we report findings above about the role of individual creative bureaucracy and partnership working to both sustain Plus One under severe budgetary pressures and to hide this from participants so as to sustain the ongoing nature of high quality caring relationships over time. While participants would not have seen this, both individuals and organisations were creatively coping with significant pressure to ensure these services were maintained. Given the importance of these ongoing relationships for the success of the intervention, it is clearly not desirable for sustained funding to be so contingently dependent on these creative coping mechanisms.

## 6.5 CORE ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME LOGIC

The evidence discussed in Section 5 suggests that there is a great deal of interest in replicating aspects of successful interventions for vulnerable groups, including Looked After Children. In thinking about learning from the specific experience of Plus One it is important to understand aspects of the programme which might be considered as central to the success of the programme logic. This is particularly the case in relation to funding organisations or attempts to 'scale up', or replicate the programme elsewhere:

- The centrepiece of Plus One is the development of ongoing, high quality relationships between the young people themselves and between the young people and the core adult staff on the project. This suggests that there are limits to scalability and cohort size, imposed by the capacity for these relationships to be sustained. It also suggests that facilitating ongoing provision and retaining high quality staff is essential.
- A second core element relates to staffing. Where Plus One was successful it was in no small part due to the quality of staffing (among core project staff and participating artists). The combination of artistic skills, charisma to lead a group of young people of such diverse ages, prior experience and additional needs and the caring ethos to allow sufficient space for each individual to develop is likely to be rare and would need to be very carefully tested in recruitment and selection processes. Put simply; this programme was reliant on exceptional staffing, it is unlikely that just any artistic professional could replicate this.
- Relationships with carers was also central. This is essential to recruiting and sustaining the engagement of young people. Relationship building with carers is therefore essential, and it may even be that Plus One could improve this in the initial induction

phase for new participants. Organising taster sessions at which young people and carers can experience a short duration sample of a Plus One activity would be valuable as a means of brokering successful integration with the wider community.

The quality of partnership working was essential to the contingent coping we report above, and this itself was dependent on ongoing and multiple organisational relationships such that the arts organisations core to Plus One had developed a shared ethos and objectives in relation to the programme, even where these were held in creative tension with external objectives, as reported above. This enabled partners to be flexible and respond to need, to transfer knowledge and ways of working between them and to craft individualised responses to the needs of young people, often which worked outside the delivery of formal outputs as promised to funders. This included working together creatively to find apprenticeship or work experience placements, match artistic expertise or mentoring to the needs of individual young people.

A balance between conscious risk taking and safeguarding is key. Plus One involves calculated risk taking in the interests of the young people involved. This was always balanced with safeguarding and the research team observed appropriate policies being in place and acted upon. However, a greater balance toward safeguarding has been introduced with the recruitment of a trained art therapist to work alongside artists and Plus One staff in the delivery of activities. This is appropriate and further strengthens the model of delivery. This is something that the research team endorse and helps to increase the capacity of staff involved in these activities to monitor and respond to safeguarding/wellbeing concerns.

Age appropriate ownership and co-production with and for the young people



is a core ethos of Plus One and central to the accounts of participant respondents who reported positive impacts on them from participation. This is clearly of central importance to their sustained engagement and their own attribution of impact.

Plus One very effectively balances an internal ethic of care with an external ethic of justice. This is central to the way that the programme currently offsets the risks outlined above and central to the age appropriate ownership of the content and creative production involved. For example, this is central to avoiding artistic endeavour becoming instrumentalised and it is also essential to ensuring that young people find and develop their creative voice and independence.

## 6.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The research was funded by the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme (DANCOP). DANCOP's objectives relate to increasing participation in HE from under-representative groups. Care leavers are one of the groups with the lowest levels of participation in HE, though data on this can be misleading because many care leavers access HE later in life, and markers of their care experience may therefore be lost. Nevertheless, with lower levels of mature students than in the past and the clear desirability of equalising experiences of transitions from youth to adulthood, independent living and access to advantageous labour market positions, it is clearly beneficial to improve access to, and progression in, HE for care leavers.

The focus of the research included a tangential element focussing on how Plus One beneficiaries might be better supported to become aware, consider and access HE. Discussions with Plus One participants

suggested the following might be helpful in supporting care leavers in this regard:

- Our respondents reported that visits to University through Plus One had been beneficial in making them feel more 'at home' in that environment. However, they also suggested that they would welcome greater awareness of what University life would be like in order to overcome fears that this would 'not be for people like them'. Becoming familiar with the research team appeared to make respondents more relaxed about this question. Targeted annual summer schools for children and young people in care with mix of fun activities and taster lectures, as well as information provided about subtle aspects of the implications of subject and institutional selection would be beneficial. These could be for mixed age groups, meaning that increased awareness and familiarity is gradually built in advance of making educational decisions, rather than being delivered all at once at key decision points.
- Some of our respondents had attended University open days but felt lost in the sea of information provided. They lacked adult support to help them 'ask the right questions'. Even where supported by carers the evidence suggests that many carers may often lack experience of HE and therefore be less able to advise young people. Universities might facilitate a pool of volunteers drawn from professional and academic staff with knowledge about course information and admissions processes who might buddy up with an individual (where required) to support care leavers at University open days.
- Universities already provide additional support for care leavers. They should though ensure that this is effective, reviewing and evaluating this; making adjustments where necessary.
- There is some concern in the literature that

the numbers and proportion of people with a care background are under-reported because they tend to access HE later in life, due to the time it takes to negotiate leaving care and achieving independence. Under-reporting in these circumstances occurs because by the time they access HE, care markers may be lost. Where this is not the case already, Universities might specifically ask applicants if they have a care background so that they can target additional support where needed.

- Universities might target work placements and bursaries for continuing study at Postgraduate level and ongoing research opportunities for care leavers. For example, PhD bursaries targeted at care leavers, including (but not limited to) research aimed to improve the lives of children and young people with care leavers.
- Several Plus One Participants suggested that Student Finance concerns about the complexity of the application process, uncertainties about the level of support and delays in payments were barriers to their accessing HE for both traditional UG courses and Apprenticeship schemes. As such, directed additional support with student finance might be targeted at applicants with a care background.
- The Plus One model might offer a way for Universities to better understand the experience of being at university for non-traditional and underrepresented groups. Given current debates about experiences of gender and race politics inside universities and data on the retention of young people with care experience and that people with care experiences often access HE later in life – some of the techniques used by Plus One to help people understand their own experiences and play them back to others might be utilised by Universities to first understand and then act on the experiences of under-represented groups to make HE more inclusive, both in terms of access and progression/retention.

Playback and Forum theatre techniques may offer an inclusive method of doing this.



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# Plus ONE

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