



# SPARK Wakefield

Report

January 2024





# Executive Summary

## Introduction

**SPARK's mission is to ensure that every child and young person in Wakefield, whatever their background, will be inspired to take part, enjoy and benefit from the rich arts and cultural experiences across the district.** They intend to be an **advocate for the value of arts, culture and creativity**, removing barriers and raising awareness with schools and families to support access both in and out of formal education.

SPARK is the Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) for Wakefield and is made up of a group of individuals and organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors, working to ensure that children and young people across the borough can enjoy, benefit from and progress in arts and culture. The partnership was formally established, with support from IVE, Yorkshire and Humber's Arts Council England (ACE) Bridge organisation, in March 2016.

In September 2022, SPARK received funding from ACE's Partnership Investment (PI) and Cultural Development Fund (CDF) grant, provided by Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and managed by ACE, to enable the LCEP to create capacity and undertake research, planning, development and evaluation. SPARK successfully recruited two key roles to develop two core strands of the LCEP over the past year.

**Creative Voice Coordinator** explored barriers faced by young people in engaging with arts and culture and potential solutions to overcome these barriers. She focused on creating pathways for young people to actively participate in shaping Wakefield's artistic and cultural landscape through the Youth Arts Ambassador programme and LitFest 2023.

**Culture on Your Doorstep Coordinator** designed and delivered a CPD (Continuing Professional Development) programme for teachers. She supported teachers in developing a place-based curriculum relevant to young people in the Wakefield district, and also conducted a pilot project with four schools, bringing together teachers, freelance artists, and cultural organisations.

Over the past year *Earthen Lamp* has been working with SPARK to support data collection at delivery level, as well as conducting a **structured organisational review to support the sustainable development of the LCEP** going forward. This report summarises the **learning points** gained from these programmes and makes suggestions for changes and next steps to be taken by SPARK.

## Methodology

*Earthen Lamp* followed a mixed methods approach to collecting data for this project. The data collection comprised monthly reflection forms for both coordinators, support of primary data collection during Culture on Your Doorstep CPD sessions and after the pilot project, and the observation of Youth Arts Ambassador sessions.

*Earthen Lamp* hosted a reflection session with the steering group members in October 2023, as well as attending a steering group meeting in December 2023.

*Earthen Lamp* conducted semi-structured interviews with various local stakeholders in November and December 2023, including young people, teachers, cultural organisations and representatives of the local authority.

The analysis presented in this report draws on all of the data collected throughout the year, which is presented in an aggregated form.

## Key Findings: Programme Review

The **structured CPD sessions reached 45 attendees across 13 Wakefield schools**. Feedback was positive across the board, with sessions described as **“inspiring”, “entertaining” and “engaging”**. Teachers who attended felt that they had gained **new ideas for the classroom**, been inspired to explore creative, place-based curricula further, as well as engage more with Wakefield’s cultural organisations. They also expressed a keenness to share learnings from the CPD sessions with their immediate teams, subject leads, other colleagues and more widely within their professional network.

Feedback shows that the Culture on Your Doorstep programme has **“inspired a more collaborative approach”** to teaching and learning across schools. It has also **fostered vital links between schools, local artists and cultural organisations**, creating local contacts and connections. Working collaboratively with artists to bring the projects to life gave teachers hugely valuable insights and practical experience, helping them to **“upskill”** and giving them the confidence to design and deliver similar projects in the future.

The pilot project provided a useful learning opportunity for the Culture on Your Doorstep coordinator personally, as well as for the project overall. The evaluation highlighted the importance of setting expectations, building longer-term relationships and having more time for planning when undertaking collaborative projects.

The Creative Voice strand comprised the Youth Arts Ambassador programme, as well as LitFest 2023. The Creative Voice coordinator shared the impression voiced by the young people that both strands of activity provided young people with opportunities to explore and add to Wakefield’s cultural infrastructure, express their creativity and make their voices heard in the cultural field. Common barriers to participation included cost, and limitations of the local/regional public transport infrastructure. As a result, free opportunities and support for travel costs help young people to engage. The experience of the Creative Voice strand shows that SPARK should **“focus on what we do best”** by **prioritising collaboration and being a link between partners**.

The **youth-led approach of LitFest** produced successful outcomes for the young people engaged in the festival. Young participants widely felt that the **“trust”, “creative freedom”** and autonomy they had during the process of co-creating LitFest gave them greater belief in themselves and their skills, ideas and career potential. Some have been **inspired to further explore creative interests**, seek similar opportunities elsewhere, or even pursue creative pathways such as directing and writing professionally.

Working with SPARK has had a **positive impact** on the Youth Arts Ambassadors. Ambassadors highlighted how **rewarding** their work was and remarked on the **confidence** they had acquired through their work with the panel, learning how to be assertive, how to express their opinions, and feeling that these were valued and acted upon by cultural organisations. For some Youth Arts Ambassadors there were also benefits to their own mental health, having **“something to get out and be involved”** with.

## Key Findings: Organisational Review

In a nutshell, the steering group understand **SPARK** as **“A meeting of minds with a common cause: championing accessibility to arts and culture”** through the creation of a holistic cultural offer.

To ensure, SPARK fulfils its ambition in the best possible way, it was important to listen to the other **stakeholders** and (potential) **cultural partners in the district** and **take on board their feedback to inform the evolution of SPARK**.

**Teachers** expressed a **limited knowledge and awareness of SPARK**, but broadly understood it to be focused on **“promoting cohesion, cultural knowledge [and] knowing your place in the world”**. There is a need for greater awareness of the opportunities available to schools and to children/young people. Teacher pointed out that **lack of time is the main barrier** impacting schools’ ability to engage meaningfully with external



organisations like SPARK. Therefore, they felt that **CPD** is most useful to them when sessions focus on **practical insights** and **discussions about professional practice**, e.g. exploring what a lesson plan might look like.

**Young people** shared that they find **interactive opportunities** particularly appealing, in contrast to only passively consuming arts and culture. Young people tend to **find out about opportunities via their existing networks**, including school, college and university, as well as word-of-mouth or social media. However, these networks of opportunity have their limitations, especially upon leaving formal education. **SPARK** made a particular **effort to tap into many different networks** and **establish new relationship** to ensure that as many young people as possible hear about the Creative Voice opportunities, even if they do not have any exiting links with the arts and cultural sector.

**Cultural organisations** in the district saw the purpose and potential of **SPARK primarily in networking, spreading the word to young people about existing opportunities** and laying the foundations for effective joint working across Wakefield. They voiced concerns that SPARK's offer could duplicate already ongoing work, instead **SPARK should encourage collaboration** and **signposting** what is going on in the district. Cultural organisations felt SPARK's strength lies particularly in **connecting arts and cultural organisations and teachers**, as well as **freelancers**.

The **council** felt that **SPARK needs to build a stronger identity** and to **work more strategically**, in alignment with **Creative Wakefield** and pursue an ongoing dialogue with them, working towards a more constructive and structured relationship.

Stakeholders voiced the **need for the steering group to be more inclusive**, as many skilled, insightful people and organisations from Wakefield are not currently represented. They understood that being a member of the steering group in its current format is time intensive, which can lead to valuable perspectives being to be excluded.

The steering group understands **SPARK as an “umbrella” network uniting, facilitating, enabling and promoting the work of its partner organisations**. Advocacy was seen as a key aspect of SPARK's work – signposting young people to partner organisations and spreading the word about their activities and opportunities, often using social media as a platform for this. In this way, SPARK seeks to bridge the gap between young people and the varied arts and cultural organisations they might engage with. As such, its model is based on developing an indirect engagement through a dynamic of pulling young people in and pushing them back out (with intention).

The challenges of this indirect model lie in impact, agency and responsibility. It can be difficult to pin down what might be classed as “impact” because, rather than only engaging with young people on-the-ground, SPARK is enabling these connections to develop in the first place.

The steering group felt the network's strength lies in this **collaboration** among like-minded individuals, which **generates the enthusiasm and momentum to reach young people** more effectively.

On a practical level, benefits were identified in terms of **using SPARK to share and centralise resources from partner organisations**. It was also felt that SPARK is at its best when facilitating active collaboration among partners, creating something bigger than the sum of its parts.

### Key learning Points

The evaluation and reflection have led SPARK to identify key areas to focus on in the coming year:

- “Our Year” Wakefield is a vital and timely moment for SPARK to consolidate its **own identity, build connections and communicate** about their work.

- A focused **review of the Terms and References** was necessary to reflect the current ambitions of SPARK. This updated document will form the basis for future communication about SPARK, as well as an evaluation framework that will allow them to measure SPARK's successes in the future.
- SPARK wishes to **strategically grow** the steering group to expand involvement by other stakeholders e.g. teachers and young people. The steering group needs to remain inclusive and representative, incorporating more voices from across the arts and cultural sector in Wakefield.
- The steering group recognised the need to review its governance structure. SPARK would like to engage with people through an **agile governance model**, e.g. working groups where the topic can be flexible/re-evaluated over time and adapted to meet the needs of SPARK. Improving the flexibility of engagement in the steering group may help to improve inclusivity and prevent valuable perspectives from organisations who have limited time and resources being missed.





Earthen Lamp exists to bring bright thinking to cultural and heritage organisations and creative businesses. What sets us apart is our straight talking approach, our experience, and attitude to tackle any challenge with gusto. We believe that simple ideas and solutions can light up the darkest corners and solve complex issues.

If you would like to discuss the dark corners in your organisation or business, or just fancy a chat to see how we can help, drop us a line.



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