

SENSING NATURE 2017/18 - END OF PROJECT REPORT

1. What did you achieve compared to your original aims?

As planned we successfully created a 'residency' for the ensemble Tactile to engage with a group of visually impaired (VI) and sighted amateur musicians and singers, to develop collaborative and individual pieces, and perform them outdoors to an appreciative public audience.

We recruited 28 local musicians to take part in 'taster' workshops in Norfolk and Suffolk in February 2017 of whom 23 (82%) were VI. Out of these, 21 people (80% VI), became involved in music workshops creating new works in response to recorded natural sounds, or joined later for the performances. Jackie Walduck (sighted) and Adrian Lee (VI) from Tactile led the half-day workshops in Ipswich and Norwich between April and June, which created new musical pieces through a process of improvisation, review and refinement.

Public promenade performances of the Sensing Nature Sound Trail took place on 30th June and 1st July 2017 at Thornham Woods. In three settings the local musicians performed the pieces they had co-created, with Tactile performing two new pieces, created by Jackie and Adrian individually, in a fourth setting. The other members of Tactile performed solo or as duets in response to the live woodland sounds between the main locations, and the audience was led along by a narrator (Tim Hall). Sighted members of the audience could experience the Sound Trail blindfolded and some took this up. A professional quality sound-recording was made of one of the performances as a record for participants, volunteers and anyone interested in the project.

As hoped, some of the VI musicians wanted to continue creating music together, and 8 musicians took part in a further 8 workshops leading to a 20-minute performance at Waveney & Blyth Arts' Annual Meeting on 21 October 2017. Ian Brownlie, a former senior tutor with Community Music East, worked with the group and successfully continued the ethos of collaborative composition through improvisation, review and refinement. The group continues to meet fortnightly and are developing new pieces for performance at a one-day W&BA event in April 2018.

The project as delivered varied from the original application in the following ways –

- One of the four 'taster' workshops was cancelled as there was no take up.
- Given the logistical challenges and physical demands faced by the VI musicians in performing in the setting of the woods it was decided during the planning to reduce the number of performances from five to four;
- Due to difficulties of recruitment arising from the location, timing and demands of the project only one intern was engaged rather than the planned two. This was more realistic in terms of management resources. Kasia Posen, who took on this role assisted with all facets of the project delivery and commented "It gave me the opportunity to learn a lot about project management and what is involved in putting on a fully accessible arts event. I picked up on ways of how to engage different groups in the local community and the benefits of generating a legacy for a project."
- Audience numbers were lower than budgeted – see below.
- The final project performance took place on 21 October at Ringsfield Hall Eco Centre NR34 8JR rather than in December at The Cut Arts Centre IP19 8BY.

2. What did you learn from the project and how has it helped you develop?

We learned a great deal from this project which has shaped our approach to inclusive working.

Designing and delivering projects that engage with disabled participants and/or audiences should not be undertaken lightly or the time required under-estimated. This is not to say that we would not do it again but we might limit the scope in future.

Foreseeing this we had formed a partnership with Norfolk & Norwich Association for the Blind (NNAB), led by their Chief Executive. Unfortunately, a few months after the ACE grant was awarded he left and no one at NNAB then championed the project. The very elderly and frail profile of most of their members had not been made clear to us so we had to develop multiple alternative approaches to recruit participants. In the end a combination of social media postings, word of mouth, Facebook groups, social and professional networks, blogs, YouTube, printed flyers and posters, specialist support groups, sensory support services and listings eventually got the word out.

Most of those who joined the project stayed but the multiple challenges that people with disabilities face (transport, unpredictable health or stamina levels, financial pressures, dependence on guide dog/driver/care assistant) meant that a significant number could not stay involved to the end.

Many of the VI participants and professional musicians were hugely resourceful and fiercely independent, but we learnt that working with people with disabilities requires not only money and time (when required to help them solve transport and mobility issues, disseminating information clearly, using suitable and familiar premises, maintaining personal/telephone contact) but also team members who have sensitivity, empathy and the right manner. We were fortunate to find such people and this was noted and appreciated by the participants.

Working outdoors is always, and inevitably, risky. We were fortunate that the week on site was dry and our back-up plans were not required, but wet weather would have added a whole other layer of complexity.

Despite securing a great deal of free coverage in local papers, magazines, journals, websites and on local radio, and extensive use of free listings and social media we found it very hard to attract the level of audience we had anticipated. We had expected organisations such as Norfolk & Norwich Association for the Blind, a project partner, and some Suffolk based ones that knew about the project as they helped recruit participants, to bring or enable their members to attend, but this did not happen. In future we would take this rather insular, or over-burdened, approach of disability support organisations into account.

The rewards of persistence were the very positive feedback from almost everyone involved. The audience members, participants, professional musicians, volunteer guides and helpers all commented on how enriching the project had been for them.

For W&BA it has helped develop our understanding of the complex needs of disabled people, and also extended our knowledge of support organisations and effective communication channels.

It has broadened our support base.

It has increased our pool of skilled (trained) volunteers, to use on future activities.

It has changed attitudes within the organisation, and amongst those who have engaged with project.

3. Any long term impact of the project?

Waveney & Blyth Arts is more aware of the needs of disabled people and finding ways to overcome these barriers. We continue to support Sensing Nature Ensemble to meet and perform together, and involve them in projects. We are also developing contacts with other disability groups such as Deaf Connexions, EffStop Eyes (visually impaired photography group) and Lowestoft Signing Choir, and forming links through activities and projects. We will call on the trained volunteer guides to provide support for these events.

Most of the Ipswich VI participants continue working with Unscene Suffolk drama group, and 8 of the other VI participants meet fortnightly as the Sensing Nature Ensemble. When asked if the project might lead them to do [music-based] things that they might not otherwise they responded very positively – *“learn an instrument and do more with music; start a singing group within the drama group; perform music with others in front of an audience; attend an educational course and join the follow-up workshops; get colleagues to improvise.”*

Tactile leader Jackie Walduck commented *“It’s been a very enriching and inspiring project ... which has begun to open up questions about site-specific work, the whys and hows of working from sounds of nature, and questions about interpretation and form which I know will impact on my future work, so on a personal artistic level, deeply felt thanks to be part of this visionary project. For Tactile this has been our first foray as a larger group into a project with community participants, and our first out of darkened concert halls. The band responded brilliantly and creatively to the brief. For Adrian and I, we were able to spend many days working together and consolidate our working relationship.”*

Volunteers commented on how taking part had increased their understanding of the challenges of disabled people, and their own confidence - *“[It was] an insight into the world of the visually impaired and also heightened awareness of the sounds of nature; a greater understanding of visual impairment as a disability and the myriad ways it can manifest; it was good to learn how to guide visually impaired people - it made me more confident that I could be of help in this way.”*

Intern Kasia Posen commented *“Working with Tactile allowed me to explore my creativity and helped me to gain confidence in performing music. The project also gave me the opportunity to work closely with the project managers / co-ordinators from whom I learnt a lot about project management and what is involved in putting on a fully accessible arts event. I know that it will help me with future projects.”*

It is impossible to know the long-term impact on audience members but their response at the time was very positive with 74% of respondents agreeing that *‘It made me listen more acutely to the sounds around’*; 62% that *‘I experienced the woodland in a new way’*, 56% that *‘Closing my eyes or wearing a blindfold made me more aware of my other senses’*, and 84% that *‘I enjoyed the performance’*. One person commented *““I have never been blindfolded or guided – fantastic experience – made my hearing much more acute, natural sounds merged with the performances. Awesome experience”.*

INCOME – explain differences between budget and actual

Income heading	Budgeted income (£)	Actual income (£)
Earned income	£2,375	£560
Local authority funding	£250	£280
Other public funding	£0	£0
Private income	£12,265	£5,800
Income total (cash)	£14,890	£6,640
Support in kind	£10,440	£11,200
Arts Council England funding	£15,000	£15,000
Income total	£40,330	£32,840

Please click the 'ADD' button above the table at the bottom of the page to add items of income.

Income heading	Description	Budgeted income	Actual income
Earned income	Box office - Sound Art Trail - 5 performances x 50 tickets @ averag...	£2,000	£433
Earned income	Box office - End of project performance - 75 tickets @ £5 average	£375	£127
Local authority funding	Norfolk County Council Small Arts Project Fund	£250	£280
Private income	Essex & Suffolk Water - Branch Out Grant	£5,000	£0
Private income	Radcliffe Trust	£3,750	£0
Private income	Scarfe Charitable Foundation	£1,200	£1,700
Private income	Norfolk Community Foundation - Lovewell Blake Fund	£2,000	£0
Private income	Other fundraising activities	£315	£4,100
Support in kind	Donated hours of specialist expertise and general assistance	£9,440	£10,200
Support in kind	Free training for volunteers in guiding VI people	£500	£500

PRIVATE INCOME

It became apparent in the planning stages that we were not going to reach our projected private income target as many of the funding applications we submitted were turned down. Essex & Suffolk Water (£5000), Radcliffe Trust (£3750) and Norfolk Community Fund/Lovewell Bland Fund (£2000) all rejected our applications, so we followed these with further submissions. The RNIB/Elizabeth Eagle Bott Fund turned us down too, but through Norfolk Community Foundation we secured £600 from Love Norfolk Fund and £500 from the Brighter Future Fund. The Scarfe Charitable Foundation agreed another £500 on top of their initial £1200, the Music Sales Charitable Trust agreed £1000, and Groundworks/Tesco Bags for Life eventually awarded the project £2000. So rather than £12,265 from private sources we raised £5800.

Based on this we scaled down on areas of expenditure without compromising the overall aims of the project.

EARNED INCOME

We also found it harder to sell tickets for the Thornham performances than we had anticipated, or has been our experience in the past. We did spend less on advertising than budgeted, due to the limited income, but managed to get a great deal of free coverage on line and in the press so it was well publicised. We had also taken the decision to reduce the number of performances from five to four (see previous comments) which may have impacted on sales.

Our conclusion was that there were too many unfamiliar aspects – the remote and not well-known setting, the unusual nature of the activity, the lack of high-profile musicians/ performers or organisation promoting it. We took the decision to discount ticket prices to residents of the Thornham area (from £9/£8/£7 to £7/£6/£5) and, in the last week, to others quoting a discount code. Whether this aided sales or just reduced the income is hard to determine.

For the AGM event ticket sales were also lower than projected, and this may have been due to unrealistic budgeting. So rather than achieving total earned income of £2375 we achieved a disappointing £560.

LOCAL AUTHORITY INCOME

Norfolk County Council awarded £280 against budgeted figure of £250.

SUPPORT IN KIND

This amounted to nearly 700 hours of volunteer time, a little over the anticipated figures due to the project assistant's ill-health. Sensing Change, the sensory support service for Suffolk, rather than Norfolk & Norwich Association for the Blind, provided training for our volunteers, but provided it for free. Thornham Estate made no charge for use of the woods as a location. In addition a private sponsor covered the costs of providing Adrian Lee with access assistance throughout the project.

EXPENDITURE - explain differences between budget and actual

Expenditure heading	Budgeted expenditure (£)	Actual expenditure (£)
Artistic spending	£19,750	£17,514
Making your work accessible	£4,590	£1,877
Developing your organisation and people	£1,000	£546
Marketing and developing audiences	£1,480	£893
Overheads	£2,062	£846
Assets - buildings, equipment, instruments and vehicles	£0	£0
Other	£1,008	£0
Personal access costs	£0	£0
Expenditure total (cash)	£29,890	£21,676
Support in kind	£10,440	£11,200
Expenditure total	£40,330	£32,876

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Expenditure	Description	Budgeted expenditure	Actual expenditure
Artistic spending	Lead artists - Fees for Jackie Walduck and Adrian Lee for new compo...	£9,000	£10,000
Artistic spending	Tactile - Fees for other Tactile musicians to contribute to worksho...	£4,000	£3,200
Artistic spending	Artists' expenses - Travel - train fares and travel to/within Norfo...	£3,400	£2,838
Artistic spending	Guest artists/technical expertise - 6 days @ £250pd	£1,500	£675
Artistic spending	Producer/site co-ordinator - 5 days @ £150pd ave	£750	£0
Artistic spending	Equipment hire - Lighting, amplification, effects	£500	£171
Artistic spending	Room hire - 20 workshop sessions @ £30 per session	£600	£630
Making your work accessible	Artists' access costs -110 hours @ £20ph for personal support	£2,200	£0
Making your work accessible	Community ensemble members'costs - estimated travel and support cos...	£1,800	£1,877

Making your work accessible	Volunteer guides for VI audience members - estimated travel costs f...	£450	£0
Making your work accessible	Sundry access : Large type information sheets and other resources	£140	£0
Developing your organisation and people	Internships - travel and other costs £500 x 2	£1,000	£546
Marketing and developing audiences	Design and print - posters, flyers, brochures, etc	£750	£643
Marketing and developing audiences	Freelance PR specialist - fee	£250	£250
Marketing and developing audiences	Advertising - on-line, local press, specialist magazines	£480	£0
Overheads	Project assistant - Average of 9 hours per month for 14 months @ £1...	£1,512	£479
Overheads	Project management travel - 500 miles @40ppm	£200	£117
Overheads	Admin costs - phone, post, stationery, cartidges, copying @ £25 per...	£350	£250
Other	Contingency : unforeseen costs	£1,008	£0

ARTISTIC

Payments to Jackie Walduck, Adrian Lee and the other members of Tactile were as budgeted, with travel and other expenses slightly lower due to cheaper train fares for Tactile members than expected. As the project developed it became clear that guest artists would not be required for the performances, and an early decision was made for artistic reasons to avoid amplification and keep technical requirements to a minimum, so we only needed to hire seating and an onsite technician/stage manager. Production and site co-ordination was provided by Nicky Stainton, as project leader, on a pro bono basis.

ACCESSIBILITY

At the planning stage we allocated a large amount of the budget to ensuring that the professional and local/amateur musicians would have the appropriate level of access support as we had no way of knowing what would be required until everyone was on board. In the event the professional VI musicians were self-sufficient, with their sighted colleagues providing practical assistance for rehearsals and around the performance site. The local/amateur musicians did require assistance with travel costs and arrangements, so most of the budget was spent on taxis, community transport scheme journeys and hire of minibuses for the performances. None of the volunteer guides claimed travel costs. We produced large-type and audio information in-house at no cost.

DEVELOPING THE ORGANISATION

Only one intern was recruited so the costs were a little over 50% of budget.

MARKETING

Expenditure was close to budget except for advertising, where we sought free editorial coverage rather than paid for advertising. This was partly due to budget constraints but more because there were no obvious advertising opportunities that could be guaranteed to reach the niche audience that was likely to respond to this particular offer.

OVERHEADS

These were close to budget apart from the payments to the project assistant. For personal reasons the project assistant was unable to fulfil the latter stages of the contract so the project leader stepped in and took on his responsibilities on a pro bono basis.

The contingency sum was not required.