



# Creativity, connection and wellbeing: Executive Summary of an Evaluation of Telling Your Story and Space to Create programmes

Emma Insley  
April 2023



# Telling Your Story in numbers

Telling Your Story is a free 8-10-week creative after school course delivered by Culture Shift in four schools in Hastings, St. Leonards, Bexhill and Lewes. Courses are delivered by creative practitioners who help young people to manage the stress and challenges they face in their everyday lives.

76 Young people supported

7 Courses evaluated

4 Secondary schools

"The course was amazing because I don't get to do this stuff at home."

TELLING YOUR STORY PARTICIPANT



of young people felt supported and valued through their course



"I feel more confident. Yay, I did it!"

TELLING YOUR STORY PARTICIPANT

# Space to Create in numbers

Space to Create is an artist-led creative wellbeing programme run by Culture Shift, delivered in primary schools. Creative courses aim to give children a safe space to develop their creativity, confidence, and self-esteem so that they can cope with the challenges in their lives.

118 Children supported

12 Courses evaluated

6 Primary schools

"The art and kindness ... I love it!"

SPACE TO CREATE PARTICIPANT

77%

of children felt supported and valued through their course

87%

of children enjoyed their course



53%

Felt more creative (using a distance-travelled scale)



53%

Feel more confident



75%

Increase in identifying as helping others or grouped with friends (using Blob Tree evaluation tool)



49%

Reported an increase in feeling good in groups



96

Children achieved a Discover Arts Award



98%

Observed as trying something new



"I REALLY liked circle time, I could share what I felt and it really helped me. When I talk it makes me not worry so much and not be upset."

SPACE TO CREATE PARTICIPANT

## INTRODUCTION

### About Telling Your Story and Space to Create

Telling Your Story and Space to Create are free, informal after-school programmes, delivered within schools across East Sussex. **Telling Your Story is aimed at children and young people in secondary schools** (Key Stage 3, aged 11 to 14) and **Space to Create is for primary school children** (Key Stage 2, aged 9 to 10). The programmes **focus on art and creativity**, with the aim of helping children and young people manage everyday stresses and challenges.

Both programmes are **delivered by Discovery College, in partnership with Culture Shift**, and are funded by BBC Children in Need, with Telling Your Story receiving additional funding from Hastings Opportunity Area. They are delivered in schools in Hastings, St. Leonards, Bexhill and Lewes by two or more creative practitioners, who have experience supporting vulnerable children and young people, and some of whom are qualified art therapists.

### About the evaluation

This executive summary highlights the key findings about the Telling Your Story and Space to Create programmes, from the independent evaluation report of the wider Discovery Arts programme, undertaken by Insley Consulting.

#### **Methods for Telling Your Story**

- **Pre- and post-course (distance travelled) survey**, including the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.
- **Young people's journal**, completed by participants during their course.
- **Observations by facilitators** of the outcomes achieved by participants.

#### **Methods for Space to Create**

- **Distance-travelled Outcomes Wheel** and **blob tree**, tools for children to colour-in to express their feelings.
- **Feedback form** to assess children's satisfaction with the course.
- **Review of facilitators' reports** on young people's progress and the course.

### Courses, participants and attendance

#### **Telling Your Story**

- **7** Telling Your Story courses were evaluated, which ran in **4** secondary schools between September 2020 and February 2023.
- **8** artists were involved as facilitators.

- **76** young people participated, an **average of 10.9** participants per course.
- **79%** of participants in Telling Your Story courses had low mental wellbeing before participating in a course.

### Space to Create

- **12** Space to Create courses were evaluated, which ran in **6** primary schools between September 2020 and February 2023.
- **6** artists involved as facilitators.
- **118** children and young people participated, an **average of 9.8** participants per course.

## FINDINGS

### Young people's satisfaction

#### Telling Your Story

Young people participating in Telling Your Story courses enjoyed themselves and **almost all (95%) felt supported and valued by the facilitators**, who helped them to develop new creative skills and ways to express themselves within a calm and relaxing environment. The participants experienced a variety of activities and had opportunities to interact with others, relax and switch off from school and other things going on in their lives.

Telling Your Story courses had an **average attendance rate of 68%**. Some of the young people participating expressed the **desire for sessions to include more physical games and artistic activities**, as well as **for the sessions or courses to be longer**.

#### Space To Create

Through Space to Create courses, children had the chance to **experiment with a variety of creative activities**, enjoying arts & crafts and music, but also outdoor activities. In this environment, the participants **had fun, relaxed, and were able to interact with others and work in groups**.

The courses had an **85% average attendance rate** and high satisfaction, with most (87%) of the participants saying they enjoyed the courses and **77% feeling supported and valued**.



## Outcomes achieved

### **Outcomes for Telling Your Story**

#### Young people experience increased subjective mental and emotional wellbeing

Of the 43 Telling Your Story participants who completed both pre- and post-course (distance travelled) surveys, **46.5% reported a meaningful positive change in their wellbeing** (of 2 points or more).

**The majority (79.1%) of participants had low mental wellbeing before participating in a course, which reduced to 60.5% post-course.** There was also a mean average **increase in wellbeing** of 2.49 points (from 19.14 to 21.63), which is **statistically significant**<sup>1</sup>. **Every course ended with a positive change** in young people's wellbeing.



*“I am a lot happier. I know how to have fun.” (Telling Your Story participant)*

#### Young people have increased skills at expressing feelings and managing their mental health

The safe and relaxed environment that facilitators created within sessions contributed to the young people feeling able to open up to others, with **most of them (95%) being observed as sharing their thoughts about a subject**. Engaging in activities mindfully and alongside others also helped participants to talk about themselves and the things that are going on in their life – **89% were observed expressing their feelings in a positive way**.

Analysis of the participants' journals also indicates that **many learned new strategies to support their mental health**, from coping skills (creative activities, distractions, sleeping) to self-care (exercising, playing, taking a break).

#### Young people are less socially isolated and feel more connected with their peers

Participating in Telling Your Story and group work through games and working on collaborative artwork gave young people the opportunity for close listening and teamwork – **96% of**

---

<sup>1</sup> Using the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test at a 95% confidence level.



participants were observed as working as part of a group and 91% were seen contributing to the group creation of artwork.

*“Yes, I now believe in teamwork.” (Telling Your Story participant)*

The interaction in the sessions allowed some young people to improve relationships with others and make new friends, with **half (49%) of the participants reporting feeling more connected to others** and **79% saying the course helped them to get on and work with other people.**

#### Young people have increased creative skills

The programme provided a **variety of creative activities**, both in terms of making tangible artwork, as well as games and music providing many spontaneous creative moments. **The majority (88%) of the young people were observed as learning a new creative skill.**

Evaluation journals showed that **young people developed skills they do not usually get a chance to**, from visual arts and crafts to creative writing and playing the guitar. Some participants gained a **new understanding of how creativity was linked to their wellbeing** – for example supporting them to express themselves or become more patient, with **43% of young people reporting an increase in using creativity to feel good** post-course.



*“The course was amazing because I don’t get to do this stuff at home.”*

#### Young people feel more resilient

Facilitators frequently observed young people as not engaging at the beginning of the course, but the relaxed atmosphere helped participants to discover their talents and express themselves, with **54% saying they felt more confident** and **49% reporting feeling more comfortable being their true selves** after the course.

Gentle encouragement from skilled facilitators led to **almost all (96%) participants trying new creative techniques**, as well as participating in new activities.

### Young people have achieved what they wanted from the course

In their evaluation journals, participants were asked to identify a goal that they would like to achieve through the course. At the end of the programme, **young people reflected on their goal – which was usually focused on creativity or wellbeing – and 58% felt they had achieved it.**

*“I achieved my goal of being somewhat confident being myself and letting ideas flow.” (Telling Your Story participant)*

### **Outcomes for Space to Create**

#### Children and young people feel good about themselves

Facilitators prioritised listening to the children and validating their contributions. **Participants were observed by the facilitators developing self-esteem in different ways**, from receiving validation of their creative achievements, through to having space to have open-ended conversations with adults and peers. This contributed to **half (52%) of the children reporting an increase in feeling good about themselves** after the course. Children's mean average scores for feeling good about themselves increased from 3.42 (out of 5) to 4.11, an average of 0.69 points.

#### Children and young people feel confident



Several aspects in the sessions contributed to confidence-building – from group sharing activities, where children had an opportunity to express themselves, to consistent positive reinforcement from facilitators, which helped children feel proud of their accomplishments. As a result, **53% of the participants reported an increase in feeling confident.**

*“I liked the teachers because they were calm and they listened.” (Space to Create participant)*

**Most (98%) of the children were observed as trying something new**, whether that was deep sharing about their experiences or participating in new creative activities.



### Children and young people feel more creative

Participants were involved in a variety of activities, including arts & crafts, games, storytelling and music, with **96% observed as developing a new creative skill** and **53% of children reporting feeling more creative**.



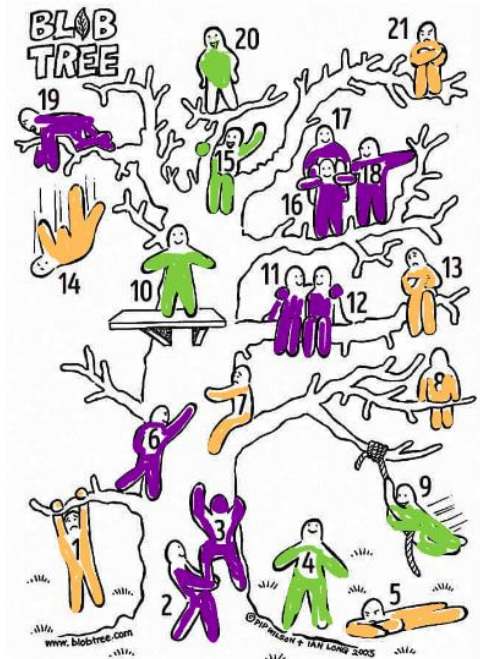
Both the safe and calm space created by the facilitators and the creative activities helped children relax and focus. This contributed to their wellbeing and materialised in group discussions that provided the space for them to communicate more effectively, which almost all of them did – **99% were observed as sharing thoughts about the subject and expressing feelings in a positive way**.

*“I REALLY liked circle time, I could share what I felt and it really helped me. When I talk it makes me not worry so much and not be upset.” (Space to Create participant)*

### Children and young people feel good in groups

The facilitators ensured plenty of time was given to group games and discussions, where children could develop their friendship and listening skills, express their emotions positively and experience working in a team. **Most of the participants were observed as working part of the group (99%) and contributing to the creation of group artwork (93%). Half (49%) of the children reported an increase in feeling good in groups.**

The Blob Tree tool, created by Wilson & Long in 2005 (right), was used specifically to assess how children feel in themselves or around others, by asking them to select the blob figure that most represents how they felt at the start and end of the course. There was a **75% increase in children identifying as helping others or grouped with friends**.



## CONCLUSIONS

### Telling Your Story

The evaluation found that:

- **Young people participating in Telling Your Story courses reported a statistically significant increase in their mental wellbeing**, as well as increases in feeling connected to others and in learning creative skills to support their mental health.
- **There is good evidence that creativity was an important contributing factor** to the recorded outcomes, helping participants to feel calm, more connected to others and finding new ways to express themselves – 88% of young people were observed learning a new creative skill and 43% reported an increase in feeling that being creative helps them to feel good.
- **Working within the school environment enabled a good attendance rate** of 68%, when compared to Discovery College arts courses (which were run in community and arts venues, at 58%), which in turn may have contributed to a slightly higher increase in average wellbeing reported by Telling Your Story participants.

### Space to Create

The research undertaken supports the conclusions that:

- **Participants in Space to Create developed new creative skills**, felt more confident and good about themselves and improved their ability to spend time in groups.
- **The courses had the unintended positive consequence of supporting 96 children to achieve a Discover Arts Award.**
- **Creative activities made important contributions to the observed change**, as these gave children space to express themselves in new ways. More than half of children (53%) reported feeling more creative and almost all (96%) were observed as developing new creative skills.
- **The environment created also contributed to positive change**, as children were able to express themselves, build confidence and feel good in groups. This was done through facilitators' efforts to create a supportive atmosphere by giving guidance and validation.

*“You've really helped me, and I've enjoyed it so much.” (Space to Create participant)*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Going forward, the following developments should be considered:

1. **Culture Shift: strengthening digital systems** to enable the monitoring of quantitative data such as attendance, survey response rates and feedback.
2. **Telling Your Story:**
  - Working with schools to **ensure that referred young people have an interest in art or creativity** and that an appropriate room is available for sessions.
  - Reviewing the delivery plan to **allow more space for young people to play outdoor physical games** as the space allows.
  - Consider **increasing the length of courses**.
3. **Space to Create:**
  - **Incorporating more reflective practice in facilitators' supervision sessions** to support them to adapt sessions to the needs of children (particularly those who are neurodiverse or who struggle to sit for long periods of time).
  - **Including a mandatory check-in with the school part way through the programme** to talk about how children are doing and any additional support they may need.
  - **Having a celebration event with parents in the last session** to highlight the children's talents and strengths, boosting their self-esteem and encouraging creative activities at home.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Emma Insley is the Director of Insley Consulting and helps third sector organisations to make a sustained impact. She brings data and stories of change to life and helps clients to think strategically about how to focus on the things that make the biggest difference to increase their impact.

Emma is a former CEO of two charities. She has written numerous Evaluations, including for FareShare UK, Parkinson's UK, MS Society, Young Lives vs Cancer, Surfers Against Sewage and Depaul UK. She lives in Battle in East Sussex.