



# BLAZE

## Impact Report

August 2021 - July 2022



## Summing Up the Year

In August 2021, the UK was reaching the end of the 'roadmap out of lockdown' following the Covid 19 pandemic. Whilst the easing of restrictions meant that Blaze could return to 'in person' delivery, we knew that the pandemic would have a long lasting impact on young people and it was important that we took time to listen to their experiences, needs and concerns. Our new Youth Advisory Group played a pivotal role in shaping how our organisation responded to the pandemic and planned for the future.

Supporting health and wellbeing was a priority this year and through collaboration with young people we developed new projects such as Stand Out and events such as Campfire that helped young people to connect with each other and feel less anxious.

Young people who took part in our projects told us that they developed a range of transferable skills and felt more confident. The Young Reviewers and Young Filmmakers projects gave young people the opportunity to develop skills specific to creative careers.

We've successfully created progression routes for young people; a participants in the Young Reviewers project have gone on to other projects and opportunities; Advisory Group members and Campfire attendees have secured employment as a result of our activity; and with our support, Young Facilitator Helena Ascough went on to lead her own cultural education project.

This year we've also had the opportunity to witness the long term impact of our work through reconnecting with people who participated in Blaze projects in 2012. Dan is now an award winning podcast producer and Anthony is Marketing Officer at a cultural venue, they both consider Blaze to have played a crucial role in shaping their careers. We look forward to witnessing what the young people we've met this year, go on to create and achieve in the future!

**Helen Thackray**  
**Blaze Director**



Thank you to all of our funders in 2021/22:



# Create Carefree

'Create Carefree' was a series of relaxed one-off workshops where young people could return to group activities in a relaxed and sensitive environment, working with professional artists to try something new or develop their creative skills. Activities included photography, spin painting and poetry. We delivered workshops in Thompson Park (Burnley) and in supported living accommodation in Chorley. At the end of the project we organised a trip from Burnley to Blackpool to visit Abingdon Studios, The Grundy, The Old Electric and take part in a workshop with artists Tina Dempsey and Garth Evans.

## What young people said...

**85%** said this was their first time participating in a creative activity like this.

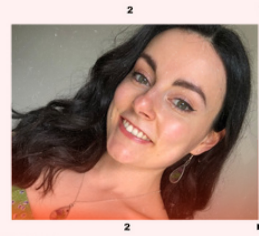
**90%** said they had learnt more about creative careers.

**'You've got more concentration out of me than my school did'**  
Workshop Participant

**72**  
participants



Developing photography skills!



# Advisory Group

In October we recruited 8 young people from diverse backgrounds to form a new advisory group. The group met with Blaze's Director once a month for seven months. During these meetings the group shaped Blaze's business plan and bid to become an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. One member of the group secured employment as a direct result of their involvement in the Advisory Group.



Making plans and decisions!

'I've loved being a member of the advisory group- I really look forward to it! It's super supportive (nothing you ask or say is judged or seems daft). There has been opportunity to do bits of group presenting of ideas which I feel has pushed me to be more confident and work with others collaboratively.'

Advisory Group Member

# Campfire

Young people told us they wanted opportunities to meet other young creatives, so in November we delivered our first Campfire - a networking event at The Larder in Preston. The event was produced by Blaze Young Producer Jonny Cosmo who had previously taken part in the Harris Young Producers project. 24 young creatives from across Lancashire and beyond came together to share experiences, ideas and make connections.

We asked attendees what they gained from the event and they said:

- Ability to connect with others with similar ideas/passions around the area
- Hearing about other people's practice
- New opportunities
- New links
- Experience in talking about my career
- Knowledge on areas I don't know
- Made some contacts and ideas
- Opportunities
- Insight

**100%**  
of attendees said that they would like to attend another Campfire

**'Great idea and crucial for communities of young people in the North'.**

**Campfire attendee**





## Campfire Young Producer, Jonny Cosmo

'I gained knowledge in all areas pertaining in and around organising an event such as this including the importance of making my own networks. The first Campfire was a great success and any issue that arose I think together we were able to come up innovative solutions (like me getting covid prior and managing to host from a projector screen). Before and after the event many many artists and creatives I have met have expressed the importance of networking and making connections but the lack of a means to do this. Campfire has been the perfect solution of bringing creatives together as the results have shown especially in connecting younger aspiring creatives to more established people in the industry. I hope to be able to bring more Campfires to the surrounding communities and mine. The sparks of the fire will grow if you feed them.'

# Young Reviewers

We worked in partnership with Voice Mag on their Local Reviewers Programme and supported a group of young people to explore and review arts and cultural activity in Lancashire. The Young Reviewers visited local galleries and heritage sites together as well as attending events, shows and screenings independently. Their reviews are available to read on the [Voice Mag website](#). The group discussed what skills and careers they were interested in and then invited relevant guest professionals to chat about their work including award winning podcast producer Dan McLaughlin who began his career as a Blaze Young Producer in 2012.

25%

of Young Reviewers never visited museums or galleries before taking part

50%

of Young Reviewers never saw live performances before taking part

100%

said they had explored new arts experiences through the project





‘During the Covid time I’ve been stuck at home, I’ve been bored a lot, a bit depressed...coming to Blaze has finally helped me...it’s a new experience that I can express myself through art. I feel a little bit recognised and I feel a little bit accepted’.

‘We’ve been figuring out new ways to express ourselves and finding places we can gain experience and inspire our creativity.’



‘I’ve made new friends, I’ve met new people and I’ve felt welcomed.’

# STAND OUT

Young people in Burnley told us they wanted to see the town's history of campaigning for LGBT+ rights celebrated and more opportunities for young LGBT+ to socialise. Together we secured funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund and a group of Young Producers aged 13 – 22 worked with freelance creatives to explore the local heritage and produce their own touring exhibition which launched at Burnley Library.



100%

said 'I feel that I've been part of a team'.

100%  
said 'I got to make decisions in Stand Out'

## Developing skills

'During our evaluation workshop the young producers took turns to talk about skills. The comprehensive list of skills they felt they had gained from the project includes communication, organisational skills, research skills, empathy, confidence, team-working, creative expression and zine making, decision making skills, conscientiousness and commitment.'

## Stand Out Young Producer, Sam\*

'Sam is on the autistic spectrum and uses they/them pronouns. When Sam first started taking part in Stand Out their co-producers described them as 'a very quiet and closed person who sat on their chair with their head down' and noted they would not contribute much. By the end they 'were owning it and talking to people they'd never known'.

Sam was a confident young producer on the day of the exhibition, showing people around the exhibits and engaging with the audience, and again during the evaluation workshop. This increase in confidence was noted by one of the freelance facilitators, who claimed seeing Sam come out of their shell was one of 'the best parts of the project' adding how special it felt when 'on the event day [exhibition launch] when Sam said how proud they was with themselves'.


During one of the activities at the evaluation workshop, fellow young producers all agreed that Sam should be highlighted as having shown the most improvement in confidence 'Sam for confidence! We're all proud of you claiming your own work'.'



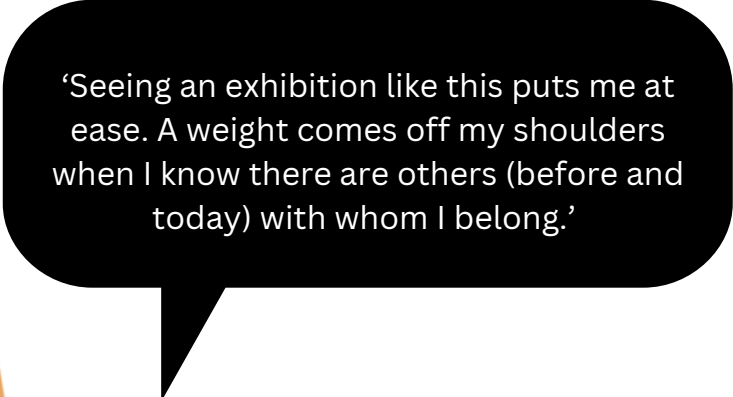
Extract from Stand Out  
evaluation report by The Evaluator  
\*Name changed for privacy

## Creating Change in Communities

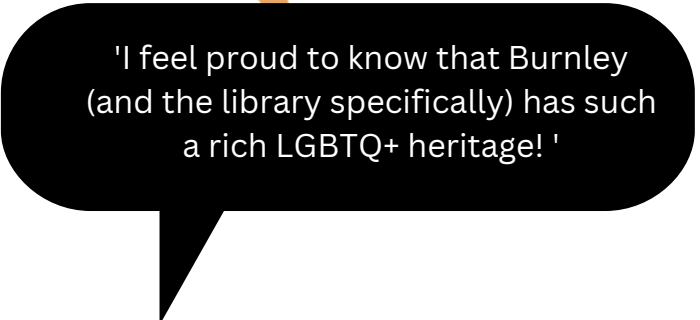
When the Stand Out exhibition launched in Burnley library, visitors were invited to leave their feedback and comments on postcards.



'I haven't lived in Burnley for quite a while, there are many things I have issues with about this town. However seeing things such as Stand Out makes me prouder than words can express. I'm proud of you all and you all should be proud of yourselves.'



'Seeing an exhibition like this puts me at ease. A weight comes off my shoulders when I know there are others (before and today) with whom I belong.'



'I feel proud to know that Burnley (and the library specifically) has such a rich LGBTQ+ heritage!'

# Film Project

To mark ten years since Blaze's first youth led festival we recorded a short film to sum up everything we've done over the past decade. We invited five young people from East Lancashire to work with Huckleberry films on the project. The young filmmakers were involved in every step of the film's production from planning interviews to recording and editing.

'My favourite thing...has been being able to learn all this new stuff that I didn't know before. Having a greater insight into the field of working as a Director.'

'Without this project I might not have learnt these skills....I think these skills are really going to help me when I'm older.'

Developing film making skills!



# Listen In Training

Blaze seeks to support and inspire other arts organisations and creative professionals to listen more effectively to young people. We recruited three young Lancashire based facilitators aged 18 – 25 to develop and pilot a new training session for creative professionals.

3  
young  
creatives  
employed



‘Blaze’s Youth Voice Training session was incredibly insightful, providing useful frameworks of participation and championed by the trainer who has first-hand experience of the power that can happen when Youth Voice is at the heart of an organisation.’

Listen In Training Attendee

16  
creative  
professionals  
trained

‘I gained a lot of **knowledge** on the teenage mind. I also gained **confidence** in presenting on Zoom and in real life’

Young Facilitator

# Outspoken

In July 2022 we supported Blaze Young Facilitator and Lancashire Poet, Helena Ascough to plan and deliver a series of spoken word workshops for young people in Lytham. The project was part of Curious Mind's Curious Commissions initiative. The young people spent three days working with Helena to explore spoken word and write their own pieces before performing them to an audience.

We asked the audience if they thought projects like this are important and they said:

'Very important – helps children learn to work with others and build confidence.'

'Yes, def! Creative Arts are squeezed in schools and expensive to access out of school.'

'I hope that there will be more of these in the area'.

## What young people said...

**80%** said they had learnt about **creative careers**

**60%** said their **confidence** had improved

**80%** said they had developed their performance **skills**



# This year in numbers

182	Young People Engaged
465	Instances of Participation*
16	Young Producers
635	Audience Members
187	Hours of Activity
16	Professionals Trained
8	Advisory Group Members
10	New Funders
17	Creatives Employed
5	Partner Organisations**

\*instances of participation refer to when a young person has participated in an activity for 20 mins or more.

\*\* Partners are organisations that have worked with us to deliver projects and/or provided in kind support.



# Who we supported

We work with young people aged 12 – 25 living in Lancashire.

The majority of young people we worked with this year, lived in Burnley or Rawtenstall, two places recently identified as Levelling Up for Culture Areas.

We support those who often face barriers to accessing and participating in arts and cultural activity.

**40%** identified as **non binary**

**34%** identified as **Gay or Bisexual**

**33%** had **long term unemployed** parents or guardians at age 14.

**47%** were eligible for **free school meals**

**27%** identify as **disabled**

The data above was collected through optional, anonymous, Equality and Diversity surveys.

# Our Partners

This year we worked in partnership with the following organisations:



We are grateful to everyone who has supported and contributed to our work over the past twelve months.



# Support Us

Blaze is a registered charity that relies on income from grants, commissions and donations. We have ambitious plans for the future and want to reach and support more young people across Lancashire.

If you would like to support our work or find out about our plans, please contact our Director on [helen@blazearts.co.uk](mailto:helen@blazearts.co.uk) or 07928668734.

You can donate to Blaze [online here](#).



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