



BLAZE

Impact Report

August 2022 - July 2023



Registered Charity Number: 1179235

Introduction

I am proud to present Blaze's Impact Report for 2022/23 which sums up what we have achieved whilst working towards our mission of supporting young people in Lancashire to develop their creativity, confidence and skills through youth led projects.

This has been a year of growth and development. We've exceeded our fundraising targets and our engagement figures have increased by 78% compared to the previous year. We delivered three projects that followed our Ignite model and gave young people the opportunity to develop **transferable skills** through producing an exhibition, museum trail and public installation.

We've continued to support some of the Young Producers who we met last year and successfully created **progression routes** for them with a number securing paid work as a result of their experience with Blaze.

At the heart of our mission is our belief that young people are capable of creating significant **positive change in communities** if given the freedom, support and resource to do so. This year the Stand Out young producers made history by organising Burnley's first town centre Pride parade and event.

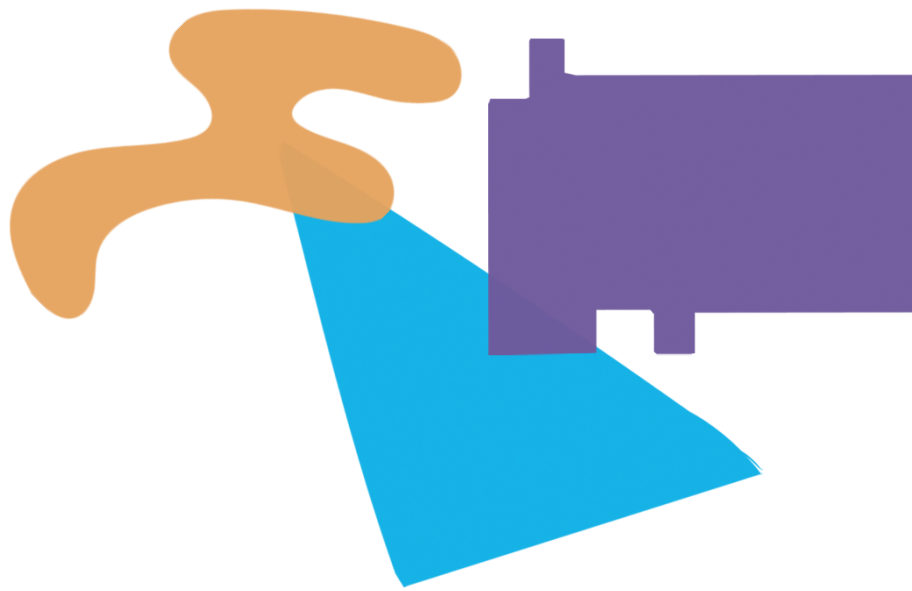
We've started using a new evaluation framework to measure the impact of our work and now have clear evidence that our projects develop young people's **socio-emotional skills** and employability prospects.

We've provided opportunities for young people to develop specific skills and experience that will support them in pursuing **careers in arts and culture**. We also co-produced Burnley's first Creative Careers event.

We're passionate about improving opportunities for young people in Levelling Up for Culture Areas and believe that cross sector collaboration is essential. We've taken a lead in relaunching **Burnley's Cultural Education Partnership** and have established new partnerships in the youth sector. We've continued to influence the arts and cultural sector to create better opportunities for young people and have **trained 82 professionals in youth voice**. Our work has been recognised nationally this year in high profile research reports and podcasts.

It gives me great pride to look back at how our work this year has changed young people's lives and made such a positive contribution to communities in East Lancashire and beyond.

Helen Thackray
Director



Thank You

Thank you to all of the funders who enabled us to deliver the activity detailed in this report:



We would also like to say a special thank you to all of the individuals who have donated to Blaze in the last year and contributed to our Crowdfunder for the Stand Out project.

Thank you to all of our partners who worked with us to deliver activity over the past year:





Why Youth Led?

During an evaluation workshop this year a Young Producer explained in their own words the impact of our youth led practice and how it felt different to other experiences they'd had:

'You just get so used to everyone taking every decision away from you. And deciding what's best for you is not actually what you want to do. It's just, you just get used to it. And in the end, you just kind of give up and be like, it's actually a lot easier. If I just, you know, let someone else take the reins, because they'll do what they want to do. And I'll just follow along.'

All of a sudden...they were like, 'Okay, well, here are your options', I'm here making a decision. For the first three weeks, nobody said anything, really. But then all of a sudden, like we found, one of us started just gradually getting rolling, it was like a bouncing off of each other. And then all of a sudden, we're having all these great conversations and ideas. And by the end of it, that's what we loved the most.'

Access All Areas Young Producer.



Who We Supported

We work with young people aged 12 – 25 living, studying or working in Lancashire.

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

We aim to support young people who face barriers to accessing and participating in arts and cultural activity.

This year we aimed to support more young people aged under 18 with the intention of introducing them to arts and cultural activities that might help inform key decisions about their education and careers. In 2023/23 39% of our participants were aged under 16.

This year we worked with young people to deliver two projects that aimed to support specific groups of young people who experience barriers and discrimination; young disabled people and young people in the LGBT+ community.

We ask young people we work with to complete a survey about themselves. This year 28 young people chose to complete the survey.

32% were not in employment, education or training.

46% identified as disabled.

14% said that their gender identity is different to the sex they were assigned at birth.

38% of the young people we worked with said the highest income earner in their household was employed in a routine or semi-routine manual service occupation or was unemployed.

25% were/are eligible for free school meals.

Future Soles

In April 2022 Blaze delivered a youth voice training session for staff at The Whitaker museum and art gallery in Rossendale. The training session ignited a new partnership and we began exploring how The Whitaker could engage and support more young people.

Together we planned and delivered Future Soles a project that invited 13 – 16 year olds to explore Rossendale's history of shoe and slipper making whilst considering the environmental impact of contemporary shoe and clothing production.

The group took part in creative activities facilitated by artist Sophie Gibson, listened to oral histories and visited Stubblee Hall to learn about the conservation of Rossendale's shoe collection. The group connected with Super Slow Way and found out about a regenerative fashion project taking place in Lancashire. They also visited Manchester Art Gallery to see the exhibition Dandy Style: 25 years of British Men's Fashion.

Inspired by their research and creative explorations the group created a new trail inside The Whitaker that introduces visitors to the shoemaking heritage of the area and the Young Producers creative work, including upcycled shoes. The trail was launched with an event in February 2023.



'I'm really happy to have got involved with Blaze. I've met some really nice people and the leaders have been really nice and supportive. I have learnt new skills that I wouldn't have been able to have access to like talking in front of a camera etc.'

Future Soles Participant.

In a focus group the participants were asked to list what skills they had developed through the project, they listed:

- Developing ideas
- Speaking in front of a camera
- Designing
- Acting
- Dancing
- Organisation
- Filming
- Investigation
- Teamwork
- Cleaning and restoring shoes
- Sewing
- Painting
- Public Speaking
- Talking to new people
- Researching new topics
- Confidence
- Photography



100% of the participants interviewed at the end of the project said that they:

- felt accepted by the adults working with them
- felt that the things they did and talked about were interesting
- enjoyed what they were doing
- felt that their ideas were respected



Scan the QR code to watch a film about the project and hear what the young producers had to say about their experience.



Stand Out

The Stand Out project began in 2022 in response to young people in Burnley telling us that they wanted to celebrate the town's LGBT+ heritage and support young people in the LGBT+ community to feel able to express their identity.

This year the Stand Out Young Producers printed and distributed their second zine about local LGBT+ culture and produced a new pop up exhibition on St James' St in Burnley. They also recorded more oral histories from local people.

In October they were invited to Birmingham to talk about their work at a showcase event exploring the impact of youth led heritage projects. Stand Out then became a case study in the report - Young People's Engagement with Heritage: Tackling Inequality & Other Opportunities for Public Policy.



The group also contributed to the Hope Streets project by creating a short film for professionals, full of advice about devising and delivering youth led heritage projects. Scan the QR code to watch it.



After a trip to Chester to meet the organisers of Chester Pride and see the Rainbow Tearooms , the group's ambitions began to grow...

The young producers decided they wanted to produce their most ambitious event yet; a Pride event in Burnley Town Centre. Whilst ideas were developing, other LGBT+ youth groups in East Lancashire heard about Stand Out and asked to be involved.

We secured funding to extend the Stand Out project and started working with LGBT+ youth groups in Pendle, Accrington and Rawtenstall whilst supporting the Burnley group to deliver the Pride event, which took place on 29 July 2023.



The event started with a parade through the town centre, led by the Young Producers. They were joined by local arts organisations, charities, youth groups and trade unions. Mike Jackson, co founder of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners travelled from London to attend the event after being interviewed by the Young Producers earlier in the year, about his experience of growing up in East Lancashire. Over 100 people took part in the parade, the first of it's kind in Burnley.



The main event took place at Burnley Mechanics and was hosted by Burnley born star of Ru Paul's Drag Race UK, Elektra Fence. It consisted of live music, talks, workshops, information stalls and activities such as t shirt printing and badge making. 130 people attended the event. 100% of the attendees who completed feedback surveys said they would attend Burnley Pride again.

'Loved how welcoming it's been, as a young queer many years ago hanging out in Burnley town centre this has been beyond what I ever imagined happening in my town centre'.

Burnley Pride Attendee

'I had the bestest time at my first Pride event. Hope it happens again next year!'

Burnley Pride Attendee

Scan the QR code to watch a short film of Burnley Pride 2023



Scan the QR code to listen to Stand Out Young Producers discuss the future of work in an Engage podcast

'The young people involved have a range of personal issues and barriers to overcome on a daily basis, however bringing them together to work on this project has developed their teamworking skills, their communication skills, their drama and performing arts skills but it has also helped them develop a sense of belonging, a feeling of self-belief and has increased their confidence and self-esteem no end.'

Lisa, Targeted Youth Service.

Whilst the Young Producers in Burnley worked on Burnley Pride, we started working with LGBT+ youth groups at the Youth Zones in Pendle, Rossendale and Hyndburn. Each group was introduced to Lancashire's LGBT+ heritage by historian Paul Fairweather before deciding how they'd like to creatively respond to the heritage and which artists they'd like to work with. The Rossendale group started work on a play, the Pendle group worked with a dance practitioner and the Hyndburn group are creating visual art. Their work will be showcased in August and September 2023.

Stand Out in numbers this year

65

Young people engaged

5

Young Producers

324

Event attendees



Meet Young Producer, Reuben

'I'm Reuben, I am a bisexual person who has lived in Burnley all my life and have always had a close connection with most public art projects that have gone on in my area. My mum has worked in the public arts sector for over a decade, and despite being painfully aware of how difficult it can be to get funding and make a living as a freelance artist, I decided I would go for it anyway. Starting out on Blaze's Stand Out project was originally a step towards this goal but also it was finally a safe space to find like minded people from the LGBTQ+ community local to me. Together we created two zines with accompanying exhibitions.

Up until this point Stand Out and Blaze Arts had purely been a voluntary role that I spent weekends taking part in whilst I was in education. However this changed entirely when we made the decision as a group to organise Burnley's first official Pride event, there was an opportunity to take on a paid role as assistant organiser and I was encouraged to apply. Given the organisational and leadership skills that the previous two exhibitions had brought out of me I felt confident enough to put myself forward and was successful.

It has been incredible being part of an organisation that strives to make a noticeable social impact in towns like Burnley. The opportunities provided to people of my generation in East Lancashire are invaluable as projects in the creative sector are more abundant in metropolitan areas, which makes breaking into this sector feel exclusive to higher income groups. Blaze has proven that this is not the case. Personally, the experience I'd already garnered during the first half of Stand Out was already enough for my CV to be hefty, but now I have established myself as a valuable freelancer in Burnley and will hopefully be able to organise even more successful Pride events, as well as do further work with Blaze and other valuable organisations in Burnley.'

Blaze In the Wild

Last year we connected with young people in Burnley through the Young Reviewers project. When that activity came to an end some of the young people asked if they could continue working together to create something in the community. They realised that they had a common interest in the environment and when the team at Burnley Words Festival invited the group to takeover a shop window in the town centre a new project was ignited.

The group designed their own logo for the project and used a Fun Palaces event at Burnley Library to invite more young people to get involved.

The group explored the environment from a range of perspectives and through different creative activities from learning about bat boxes with the Canal and River Trust to foraging with Pendle Plant Craft.

With support from Super Slow Way the group had the opportunity to work with artist Rebecca Chesney and writer Roy McFarlane. A highlight of the project was taking part in a creative writing workshop on Small Bells Ring, a floating artwork, writer's studio and community library.



'The project was really engaging. It encouraged creativity and going past ones comfort zone. The project relied heavily on teamwork, which I feel is beneficial for growth.'

Blaze in the Wild Participant.



The group then worked with artist Kate Eggleston Wirtz to create an installation in the shop window inspired by their creative writing. They launched the window display at an intimate event in the shop where they performed their creative writing and invited guests to take part in activities inspired by the project.



***'I believe that things can change
Nothing stays the same
Nothing is important
But some things are.'***



***'I believe that even in the weeks of a drought
That there is still a water source
Maybe undiscovered, but still there.'***

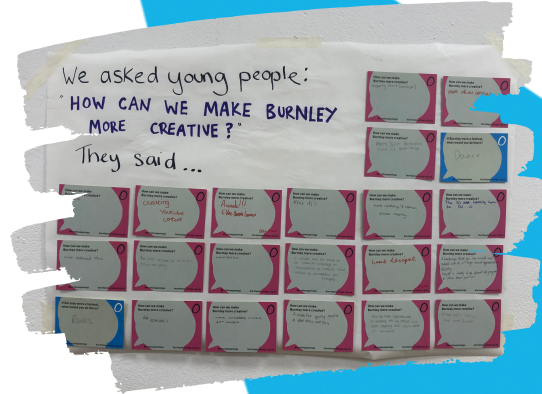
12 young people participated in Blaze in the Wild. At the end of the project the participants were asked what went well and a number of them talked about overcoming challenges and problem solving.

***'We achieved our goals despite uncertainty.'
Blaze in the Wild Young Producer***

We used pre and post project surveys to measure improvements in socio-emotional skills. The surveys shows that participants developed in problem solving and taking on responsibility.

Burnley LCEP

This year we've taken a lead role in relaunching Burnley's Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) which aims to improve access to cultural education for young people in the town. We consulted with local young people and professionals working in the education, youth and arts and culture sector to establish priorities for the LCEP. Throughout the process we've been ensuring that young people's voices influence the work of the partnership. We've facilitated meetings and worked with partners to develop an activity plan which includes recruiting young Creative Activators. There are now over 40 people on the LCEP mailing list and meetings are taking place bi-monthly. We are now working with partners on a fundraising strategy.



Creative Careers Event

Through the LCEP we worked with Burnley Youth Theatre to organise Burnley's first creative careers event in March 2023. 5 schools brought over 80 pupils to the event. The event consisted of a creative careers marketplace (where over 16 creative professionals provided information about creative careers, education and local opportunities) and 4 taster workshops focusing on specific skills and career paths. We used the event as an opportunity to consult with young people about their thoughts on arts and culture in Burnley.

'...our students LOVED the creative careers workshop last week! They have come back with so many ideas and a clearer idea of their options choices too. Thank you so much, they have a real buzz!'

Teacher at Marsden Heights.

'I learnt about different careers that I didn't think of before, for example textiles and modelling. I enjoyed the DJ session as I have never done this before.'

Pupil at Hyndburn Academy.

Access All Areas

The third Ignite project of the year was Access All Areas. The project evolved out of conversations with disabled spoken word artist and Blaze Young Facilitator Helena Ascough.

Blaze invited young disabled people to meet in Preston on a weekly basis to share experiences and ideas, meet and work with professional artists and create something for their community.

The group chose to make a call out for local artists to submit work for an exhibition which they then curated and shared at an event in Preston town centre.

The audience responded positively to the work, finding the exhibition and event informative about disability, and positive for the local area in terms of its cultural offer and its young people with disabilities.



Scan the QR code to watch a film about the project



‘The impact of their involvement for young people was evidenced in an increased optimism and enthusiasm for the future; more resilience to tackle and overcome problems; greater self-confidence and belief in their own abilities; and increased transferable skills (particularly in written and verbal communication). The impact was profound in terms of personal growth and a renewed sense of identity; connection with others, especially friendships with young people with similar life-experiences; creativity, inspiration, and a renewed love of making art. Access All Areas gave young people with disabilities a sense of purpose that motivated them to leave the house to regularly attend the group sessions.’

*Excerpt from Access All Areas External Impact Report
by Steph Hawke Phd.*

Quotes from the Access All Areas Young Producers

CONNECTION

'I just found that when I became visibly disabled, then all of my peer group just didn't want anything to do with me at all anymore, which was really hurtful. It was very hard to deal with. And then all of a sudden, I had a space where I could go and show up every week and nobody cared if I was spasming all over the place, because they just get it. So it was really amazing to kind of, been able to, solidify my identity as a disabled person.'

CREATIVITY

'I've not been able to be creative for a long time. And actually, this has allowed me to, to have that creativity back.'

SENSE OF PURPOSE

'... for about a year before I started this project, I was just at home and occasionally hanging out with some friends. I did not have much going on at all. Doing this project allowed me to come out every week, or miss a week because sometimes I've not been able to make it out of bed, you know, but having somewhere that I know I can go to, having somewhere, meeting these people, having this experience is just absolutely, you know, I've been able to rewrite the days for me. You know, it's given me back a portion of my life.'

Meet Young Producer, Bee



'Hi my name is Bee, I'm 24, I'm queer, disabled and chronically ill and use she/they pronouns. The Access All Areas project has been my first Blaze Arts project and I have had the most amazing experience so far. When I first saw the project advertised on social media I was so excited to see something for young disabled people like myself because I had never seen anything like it before local to the Preston area. As someone with an acquired physical disability, I had been struggling to meet with people similar to myself and was still trying to establish confidence in my identity as a disabled person however I have always been a very creative person and so the project was the perfect opportunity for me.

From the beginning, it was a room filled with voices passionate for different types of art, design and media ready to explore and create something of our own to share with the world. As well as the opportunity to socialise with peers, I was eager to experience the work and company of established disabled creatives throughout the project. From the introductory session to the final stages, Access All Areas producer Helena and team have tailored the sessions to the needs, wants and preferences of participants like myself which has been incredibly empowering overall, even if terrifying at the beginning. I have both made and strengthened friendships within the group whilst networking with the artists from the project which has increased my confidence massively. After such a long time of being chronically ill and unemployed prior to this project, I finally found a spark of passion to start creating the content I had only ever fantasised about.

The project pushed me to practise my digital design, writing, video and photo editing skills outside of the meetings as well as the social and personal development I was experiencing within the weekly sessions. We were taken on a trip to the People's History Museum in Manchester to see an exhibition about disability rights and protest which was an incredible opportunity that I would not have been able to participate in were it not for this project. Overall, the project has taken me on a journey of personal and professional discovery alongside the different artists and mediums that this Blaze project introduced to me.'

This year in numbers

324 Young People Engaged

1022 Instances of Participation*

24 Young Producers

1362 Audience Members

296 Hours of activity

82 Professionals Trained

29 Creatives Employed

(over 50% living in Lancashire)

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



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 work with us, please contact our Director, Helen Thackray on helen@blazearts.co.uk or 07928668734.


You can donate to Blaze online by scanning the QR code:



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