



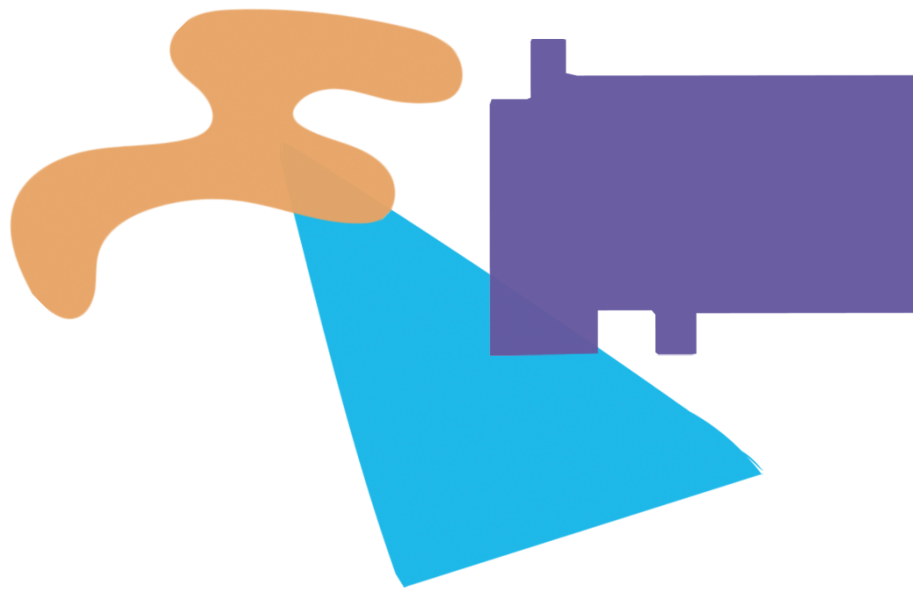
BLAZE

Impact Report

August 2023 - July 2024



Registered Charity Number: 1179235



Thank You

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



Thank you to all of the partner organisations and freelance professionals who have contributed to the delivery of the activity.

Introduction

We are an agile organisation, constantly listening, reflecting, learning and adapting. This year we have experimented with doing things differently to make our activity more accessible and inclusive.

Thanks to funding from Youth Music's Trailblazer Fund we have piloted a new 'Sparks' programme called *Music or Lose It* which has taken professional musicians and equipment into youth and community centres across Burnley. Delivering 'drop in' sessions on young people's doorsteps has enabled us to meet and support young people we've not been able to before.

We've also trialled working in secondary schools, delivering an Ignite project called *Round Our Way* through after school clubs. Working in these new locations and with new partners has meant that we are giving more young people with different backgrounds the opportunity to develop their confidence, creativity and transferable skills.

The broader social impact of our work has been recognised at a regional and national level. Our *Stand Out* project featured in the Social and Cultural Infrastructure for People and Policy Paper, and was presented to civil servants as an example of activity that 'utilised heritage to address social exclusion as well as to improve the health and wellbeing of young people'. In May 2024 the *Stand Out* Young Producers won the Northern Cultural Education Award for Arts Activism in recognition of the work they have done to promote diversity in Burnley.



Whilst we continue to nurture the next generation of producers, activists and entrepreneurs in Lancashire, we are also contributing to change at a regional and national level. We are part of the Lancashire Consortium of organisations working on *Arts4Us* (a £2.5M AHRC funded project exploring how creative activities can support young people's mental health) and we are a partner on *Nature Calling*, a national project transforming people's relationships with our National Landscapes including the Forest of Bowland, through arts.

I hope you enjoy reading about how our activity enables personal development for young people whilst contributing to building stronger communities.

Helen Thackray
Director, Blaze



Why Youth Led?

During our *Access All Areas* project 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 13 – 25 living, studying or working in Lancashire. We prioritise supporting young people who face barriers to accessing and participating in arts and cultural activity.

We ask young people who engage in our projects to complete a anonymous survey which contributes to a demographic profile of our beneficiaries. This year 33 young people completed the survey.

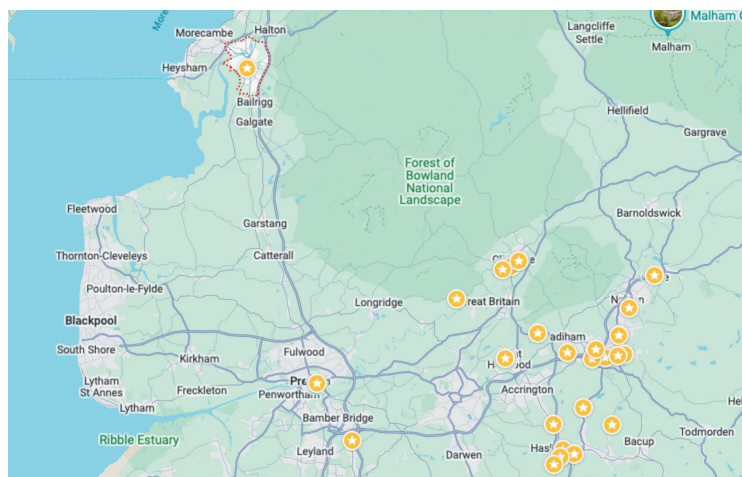
This year we engaged with more 13 - 16 year olds (45% compared to 39% the previous year).

12% of the young people we engaged with were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This is the majority of the 18 - 25 year olds that we worked with.

48% were eligible for free school meals (increase from 25% in the previous year)

Participants belonged to 7 different ethnic groups (White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish, White Irish, Any other white background, White and Asian, Pakistani, Romania and Arab) compared to 4 in the previous year (White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish, Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background, Pakistani and Any Other Asian Background).

The map below shows the geographical reach of our activity with many young people travelling over 20 minutes to attend projects and sessions.



Music or Lose It

Young people have previously told us that they want more accessible and diverse music education opportunities. We responded with a new project called *Music or Lose It* funded by Youth Music's Trailblazer fund.

Burnley musicians Leon Akbar, Beki Hughes, and Joe Rainbird delivered music workshops in Gannow Community Centre, Stoops and Hargher Clough Community Centre and Burnley Youth Zone. We provided professional equipment which enabled young people to have a go at DJing, music production and performing.

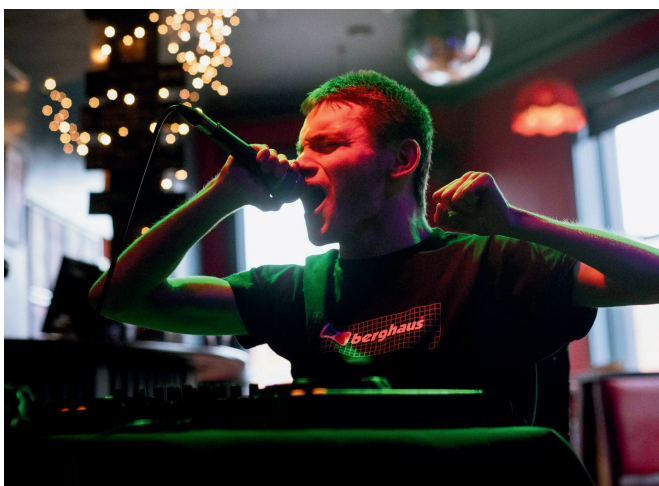
Through our links with the Manchester based organisation Brighter Sound, two young people who took part in *Music or Lose It* had the opportunity to perform at gigs in Manchester city centre for the first time.

The participants had the opportunity to recruit a producer to support them in planning a youth music event which will take place in October 2024. They chose Rizwan Iqbal to work with them on the next phase of this project.



61

young people
engaged in
Music or Lose It
sessions



Credit Isobel Greenhalgh



We asked young people what they had gained from taking part in the project and they said:

- ‘Used DJ equipment for the first time’
- ‘Used music production software for the first time’
- ‘Received information about careers in music’
- ‘Performed music to an audience’



We asked young people how the Music or Lose it sessions make them feel. They said..

The sessions make me feel more:

OPTIMISTIC

HAPPY

ENERGISED

CONFIDENT

The sessions make me feel less:

BORED

WORRIED



‘I started the first ever session and now I’m getting booked for real events which is crazy considering I only started then the first session started up.’

‘Rizwan gave me the motivation and hope that it’s possible to do something in music/events even if you come from a place where it’s not easy to get into.’

Quotes from Music or Lose It Participants.



Meet Matty

'My name is Matty B, I'm from Blackburn Lancashire and I love DJ'ng. My dream is to become a world wide famous DJ like Andy Whitby. I started attending Blaze Arts last year, it was great to make music and get tips from other DJs.

Blaze arts gave me my first opportunity to do my first ever gig in Manchester which was absolutely amazing, I then did another gig at ossyfest which was also amazing ! I have a booking for Encounter Festival with Blaze Arts this weekend and another in October called Music or Lose It.

I can't thank Blaze Arts enough for all these opportunities and helping me get on the ladder to be a famous DJ!

I am very grateful.'

Matty B

Round Our Way

Sam Hanna was a pioneering film maker who made hundreds of films from the 1930s to 1980s, documenting life and culture in Burnley. We used his archives of films as inspiration for the *Round Our Way* project which saw students from three different high schools working with filmmaker Graham Kay to create their own 30 minute documentary film about the past, present and future of Burnley.

During the project the groups visited Towneley Hall to see Sam's cameras and they also visited North West Film Archive in Manchester to learn more about the history of film making and history on film.

We worked with Pendle Press to publish a new book called *Round Our Way: Sam Hanna's Visual Legacy*, written by Heather Norris Nicholson. The students had the opportunity to meet Heather and Sherif who published the book, and have their project documented in it.



Photo credit Isobel Greenhalgh
Photo credit Diane Muldowney



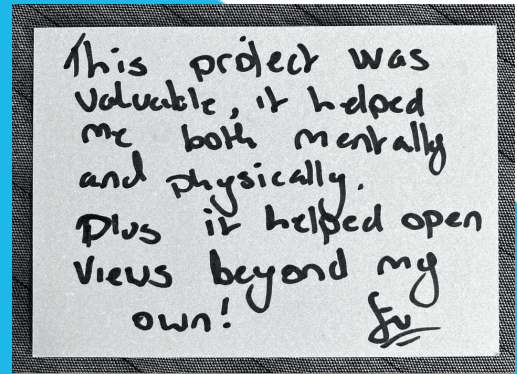
Photo credit Diane Muldowney



Scan the QR code to watch the Round Our Way film

The project culminated in an exhibition at The Salon gallery in Burnley and a celebration event for the local community and everyone involved in the project. 30 young people engaged with the project.

- 92% of the participants believed that they had learnt some new and different career paths through *Round Our Way*
- 75% agreed that they are now prouder of their town since taking part in the project
- 83% of participants felt like they had become more of a team player since being involved in *Round Our Way*
- 67% felt comfortable talking to a wide range of people from different backgrounds which could impact positively on social cohesion in the area



This project was valuable, it helped me both mentally and physically. Plus it helped open views beyond my own!

Feedback from Round Our Way Participant



Photo credit Diane Muldowney

‘It’s nice seeing the town I grew up in, seeing the spotlight it deserves. And young people showing an interest and appreciation is refreshing.’

Visitor to Round Our Way Exhibition.

We also delivered a CPD event for local professionals interested in co-creating films with young people. 100% of attendees said that the event was useful.



Access All Areas

This year we have started a new phase of the Access All Areas project, working in partnership with Encounter Festival. A group of young disabled creatives have been working with disabled artist and facilitator Helena Ascough and Maia Barker to learn more about festival production and access and inclusion within arts and culture.



They were visited by Access Consultant Ash Cox who delivered a presentation about their work.

The group also went on a research visit to The Festival of Making in Blackburn to gain inspiration for their own contribution to Encounter Festival. The group decided to produce a Silent Disco at Encounter Festival in September 2024. Full evaluation of the project will take place after the event.



100%
of Access All Areas
participants
identify as disabled.

'You gain confidence if you see other people that go through similar experiences.'

Access All Areas Participant

Pride of Place

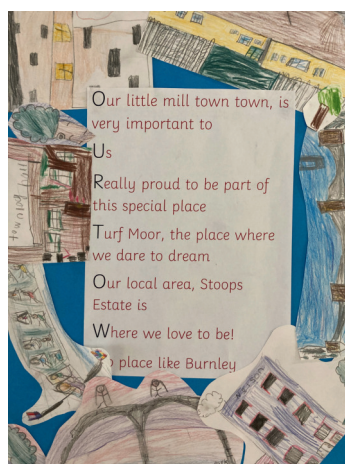
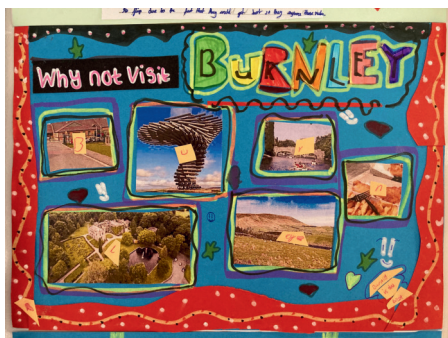
This year we recruited three young adults to take on the role of freelance 'Creative Activators' in Burnley and make connections between young people and cultural organisations.

Amber, Beth and Olivia worked with Burnley Leisure and Culture to successfully engage over 800 children and young people in the Pride of Place project. They were mentored throughout the process by Katie Douglas.



Together they created a Resource Pack for local schools, encouraging teachers to deliver lessons and assemblies about the project. 5 Primary Schools contributed work to an exhibition in Burnley Town Centre which documented the things that make people proud of Burnley.

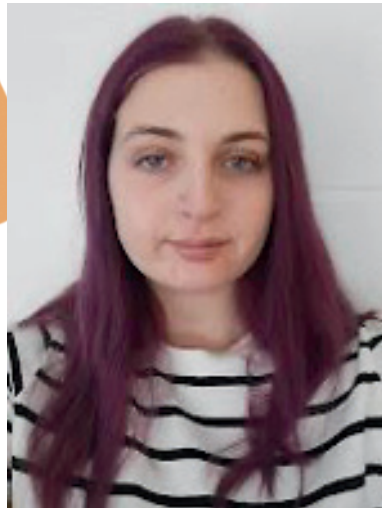
They also programmed photography and canvas painting workshops where young people aged 13 - 18 could work with professionals to create their own artwork to add to the exhibition.



The Creative Activators received brilliant feedback from local teachers:

"I led an assembly for the whole school to launch the event for us, it was really well laid out and informative. The range of ideas and resources given were great and gave the children a fab baseline for their own work. They found it easy to follow and complete work. They had pride in the project and it was great to give the children an opportunity to talk about their home town."

Natasha Willenbrook from Cherry Fold Community Primary



Meet Creative Activator, Amber

'Hello I am Amber and I'd love to share with you a bit about me and my work I have done with Blaze.

I am a carer for my younger brother with autism and I have worked as a Creative Activator for nearly a year working on community projects to increase young people's socialisation, decreasing loneliness and isolation and participation in arts and culture. It has been a real treat professionally and personally to work with Blaze Arts. I have had previous experience working for a charity but I have never encountered a charity as young person centred as Blaze. Everything is made for and co-produced with young people and it's amazing to be a part of this.

I started my role and was surprised at how much independence we were given with to explore our creativity in shaping projects and this really helped me develop my own confidence and see solutions to problems I may have never seen before. I have loved working alongside a range of young people and my fellow Creative Activators. My favorite achievement was our events such as a music community event called Central Sounds which had amazing performances from a range of talented young people. I have also loved meeting and working with other young people who work with Blaze and seeing what they are getting up to.

I have recently accepted a position in community engagement for another amazing charity around Burnley and I am looking forward to keeping the connections I have made with Blaze to share resources, professional links and ,of course, to hear about the range of projects that Blaze does.'

Know Your Neighbourhood

The Creative Activators also worked with Lancashire County Council on the *Know Your Neighbourhood* project at Burnley Central Library. Amber, Beth and Olivia consulted with over 200 young people to find out what events and activities they wanted to see at the library.

‘We found that young people desperately want spaces that are open to them where it is apparent that they are welcome and accepted! In addition to this, we needed to provide young people with an activity or event that could improve their social isolation and loneliness which has become a larger issue post Covid where young people are not accessing the services and spaces that can give them opportunities to socialise with other young people and the other diverse members of their community.’ Amber

In response to the consultation, the Creative Activators produced a live music event at the library called Central Sounds. Through an Open Call they booked 5 young singers and musicians to perform.

100% of attendees said they enjoyed the event

Feedback from the attendees included:

“It was an amazing experience, something new and definitely needed in the area.”

“100% not enough opportunities like this, especially for this age range.”



62
people
attended
the
Central Sounds
event



Advocating for Youth Led Practice

We are constantly looking for opportunities to share our practice and learn from others. This year we've continued to contribute to Burnley's Cultural Framework Steering Group and deliver training for other organisations.

Burnley LCEP

This year we've continued to lead Burnley's Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) with meetings taking place every two months. We've brought together over 10 partners to share information and work collaboratively to improve Cultural Education in Burnley.

The LCEP has developed plans for a youth led festival which will take place in Burnley in July 2025. Our ambition is to engage 900 young people and 17 organisations in the festival.



Burnley LCEP meeting at Burnley College

Listen In Training

We continue to offer training exploring how organisations can listen more effectively to young people and co-create with them. In July we delivered a training session in Blackburn for staff from organisations taking part in the *Chip In* Youth Volunteering Programme. Feedback included:

'Very good training, well paced, well timed and good mix of practical exercises, chances to discuss with others shared practice and learning new theories - nothing to change here.'

'Very informative and useful session delivered by passionate experts - an overall great workshop showcasing important skills that can be implemented into the workplace immediately!'



This year in numbers

441 Young People Engaged

1102 Instances of Participation*

559 Audience Members

298 Hours of activity

104 Professionals Trained

19 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 below:



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