



Stephenson Steam Railway, North Shields. Photography by Colin Davison

NETWORK AMBASSADORS PROGRAMME 2019 - 2022

Key Learnings and Findings



Family Arts
Campaign

Key Learnings and Findings

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This summary explores the key themes that have emerged through Family Arts Campaign's three-year Network Ambassador programme, including significant changes, areas of development and challenges.

The evidence demonstrates the crucial role that Ambassadors have played in developing and deepening family engagement with arts and culture in their regions, particularly amongst underserved families. The findings illustrate the impact that the Ambassadors have had on widening networks, and growing and diversifying family audiences nationally.

The findings also illustrate that the model has been successful in providing a framework for sharing and amplifying best practice with and between regions, where knowledge has been disseminated and shared by the Ambassadors.

Quotes are attributed to network ambassadors throughout. However, in some instances, where qualitative data was gathered in a focus group setting, they are anonymised.

Adapting to regional network specificity

A key strength of the programme has been the situated way in which each individual network has evolved, with Ambassadors co-developing and driving strategies with network member organisations to respond to the needs and priorities within their areas. This bespoke approach has led networks, some of which were primarily focused on marketing activities, to create strategies to better identify and address specific regional needs, and in doing so has provided a nuanced, joined-up area of focus in each setting.

The Ambassadors have provided training, support and resources for networks to develop new areas of practice, form new partnerships and reframe their activities in a strategic and relevant way. For example, ensuring work is accessible to multilingual households, working directly with foodbanks to serve families in poverty, and encouraging step change within organisations to be more accessible.

In the North East, for example, BALTIC art gallery and Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums have undertaken the Poverty Proofing© process as a result of the work of the Ambassador. This has led to staff across the organisations engaging in Poverty Awareness training and consulting with families from areas with higher levels of poverty that do not currently access the organisations; these activities lead to structural changes and policy developments to eliminate inequalities and improve accessibility. Therefore, Ambassadors have been responsible for driving social agendas and change within their regions through the programme.



The project has enabled us to do something that we've been wanting to do for a long time and that is to proactively support cultural organisations to diversify the family audiences that they're reaching and making sure that those families' voices are heard... We prioritised families living in poverty... We've redone our Aims, Mission, Values statement... We've offered training to cultural organisations to better reach more diverse audiences...



- North East Family Arts Network Ambassador

Ambassadors have also been responsive to the practical and logistical needs of network members in their areas. For example, in Cumbria, a key challenge is the rurality of the area and the large geographic distances needed to travel across the region. The Ambassador in this area has been particularly sensitive to the needs of the network, many of whom have limited capacity, particularly where activities are volunteer-led.

For some Ambassadors, including the North East network, the geographical spread of their networks has meant online meetings have provided a more accessible way for members to connect. In other regions, such as Bristol, meeting members where they are delivering planned activity, sometimes during activities outdoors, has fostered an inclusive and flexible approach to maintaining links and building relationships.

A key area of learning for many Ambassadors has been developing the ability to align capacities for family work and the objectives of individual partners within their networks to create a model and way of working that is suitable for all.

Sustaining and Widening the Networks & Developing Capacity

Regional networks are now more active than before Ambassadors were in post. The Ambassadors, with their strategic and connecting role have broadened and deepened engagement within their settings, providing a vital sense of continuity to the work of members.



The Network worked well together already before the programme but [the Ambassador programme] has been helpful to keep things moving and [keep] communication regular. Continuity is key and it makes a huge difference to have a regular person dedicated to the network.



- Derby Lead Organisation



Having someone dedicated to the Network was really good towards galvanising Network activity.



- Sunderland Lead Organisation

A notable shift within networks has been heightened engagement from Learning and Participation professionals. In many cases, this has shifted the focus of the engagement, to more in-depth relationships being developed with families and external partners.



The most significant change has been where the focus for the network has moved to... we have seen that over the years, the network has shifted to mainly learning departments...We are all wanting to find new ways of engaging with more diverse families and we are noticing the way to do that is not through marketing but through partnerships with non-arts-based organisations.



- Sunderland Ambassador

Across the programme, Ambassadors have noted the benefits of creating a joined-up strategy, particularly in encouraging a collaborative approach between members, and ensuring that underserved families are at the centre of the activity. Networks that were previously disconnected and unengaged are now re-energised as a result of the Ambassador programme and are keen to work together, rather than compete, to reach family audiences.



We now have an Aims, Values and Vision statement and a Case For Support document developed with our steering group so we can be focused and hit the ground running with fundraising to extend our work diversifying audiences.



- North East Ambassador

The Impact of the Pandemic

The escalation of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK from March 2020 significantly impacted programme delivery during the first two years of the programme; host organisations closed and many staff were furloughed. In-person activities were cancelled or postponed, and Ambassadors and networks had to quickly pivot to digital and remote ways of engaging with local families.

Ambassadors worked to address the additional challenge of keeping network organisations engaged when in-person meetings were not possible, staff were furloughed, redeployed, or overstretched responding to Covid-19. However, the challenges of the pandemic and the activity of Ambassadors within their Networks have highlighted the benefits of collaboration to a greater degree than before the Ambassador programme.

Non-arts organisations collaborated more with Networks than was previously expected before Covid-19. These collaborations and relationships have continued since, emerging as a strong legacy of the programme overall.

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The pandemic has opened up and sped up non-arts relationships that may otherwise only have been opening up at the end of the three-year programme.

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- Bristol Lead Organisation

Experimenting with and sharing new approaches to reaching under-served and vulnerable families, such as remote/postal, hybrid, outdoor, and new partnerships emerged through this period.

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Digital engagement gave opportunities to engage with new audiences who may not have come to the venue beforehand.

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- Sunderland Lead Organisation



Covid has meant that we could engage harder to reach audiences, e.g. through the relationship with food banks [distributing arts packs], reaching families that [Network members] may never otherwise have had contact with. Covid has been a catalyst for reaching new audiences. Also, our Adoption Counts [regional adoption agency] partnership has been a way to connect with another type of family that [Network members] hitherto hadn't been connected with.



- Manchester Lead Organisation

As a result, collaboration and centralising the needs of family audiences are now seen as more important within network settings than previously.



The fact that network organisations are aware of the programme is important, it revitalised the network and created a new potential for collaboration. It acted as a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.



- Cumbria Lead Organisation



Family audiences came back in strength in Spring 2021. Very keen to re-engage, realising the value of arts and culture in their lives.



- Derby Lead Organisation

It is evident across networks that having dedicated Ambassadors in post helped to keep network momentum going during Covid.



Holli (Cumbria Ambassador) has been important to maintain the existence of the network. If not for the Ambassador post, the network would probably have stopped during the pandemic and would have had to restart after [it]. Having Holli in post to maintain connections and keep the network alive during the pandemic has been invaluable.



- Cumbria Lead Organisation

Data Collection and Evaluation

The Ambassadors' ability to adapt and be responsive to the various waves of the pandemic led to new practice and knowledge being developed in some areas, particularly around inclusivity.

Collecting data, in particular quantitative data about families from members has been a continued challenge across the networks over the course of the programme, and is reflective of a sector-wide issue. There are a number of reasons for this, including limited staff time, gaps in knowledge around data collection, particularly where activities are volunteer-led, and the drop-in nature of some family arts activities, particularly free participatory activities, where often advance booking is not always necessary and data is not captured in advance and/or is difficult to collect in the moment with more transient interactions within the space.

These issues were exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to fluctuating staff capacity as a result of widespread furloughing, which resulted in events often being delivered with limited staff and/or volunteer capacity (particularly evident in Cumbria where many of the arts venues rely on older volunteers who were reluctant to return to in-person events). This affected the ability of event staff to collect evaluation data in the same way.

Collating and then analysing this data has been problematic as there are inconsistencies in the methods and forms of data collection, as well as disparities in the quality of data provided by Network members.

A further complication is that some network organisations do not track 'family' audiences (e.g. adult and child groups) , or have different definitions of what this means; similarly with 'new' families. This causes difficulties in collating data to quantify increases in family engagement across and between networks.



A new family is difficult to define (within the) network, without cross referencing data between orgs, and that would be a whole other level of data sharing and analysis that we wouldn't be able to do.



- Ambassador

However, the regional insights, feedback and reporting from Ambassadors were a positive and important aid for the Campaign team to better understand circumstances in regional Networks, particularly during the pandemic. This information helped to shape the Campaigns sectoral training and development programme for the wider sector.

Non-Arts Partnerships

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The most significant change has been the network's involvement in non-arts-based partnerships. We have seen over the last few years, perhaps because of Covid, the growing interest in health, wellbeing and family activity.

- Sunderland Ambassador

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As noted above, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted programme delivery with Ambassadors working to address the additional challenge of keeping network organisations engaged when in-person meetings were not possible. Priorities shifted to focusing on how arts organisations could support and serve families' needs, particularly those vulnerable to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. In many cases, this led to new partnerships being developed between networks and non-arts organisations such as foodbanks, community centres and schools. A legacy of the programme has been the ways in which these partnerships have been sustained as a result, widening opportunities for collaboration with more diverse partners and underserved families.

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Holli [Cumbria Ambassador] has extended reach in terms of non-arts organisations as well as making contact with new arts organisations in Cumbria.

- Cumbria Lead Organisation

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The Ambassadors have been integral to nurturing these relationships with non-arts organisations, with many noting how their role has evolved to become more heavily focused on facilitating partnership development. Particularly for members with limited resources, this has been crucial in developing their capacity to collaborate more widely across their local areas and increase the accessibility of their offers; to reach families traditionally underserved by arts and culture.

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My role has been changing and evolving ... In Sunderland, we're looking at different ways of engaging families, and how Arts and Health and social prescribing and the different networks where Family Arts Network Sunderland is now represented ... that's been a development for me, of holding those relationships on behalf of not only my work, but for the partnership and for the network, and having that overview of things that happen in the city to make those connections...

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- Sunderland Ambassador

In addition to nurturing partnerships with non-arts organisations, the Ambassadors have steadily grown their network memberships with a range of organisations joining with different areas of cultural focus, such as the National Football Museum in Manchester.

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We've had lots of new partnerships and collaborations – Children North East, Tin Arts, two CPPs (Creative People and Places participating organisations) in the North East (Cultural Spring and East Durham Creates), and Newcastle Libraries. All of these ... help [the Ambassador] to better support the Network to diversify their family offer and support families from all backgrounds.

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- North East Lead Organisation

Diversifying Family Audiences

There has been a shift over the three-year programme amongst networks, partially prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic, to better consider the needs of families and put them at the centre of family arts practice.

“ There’s been a shift in purpose. ”

- Manchester Network Member

As described above, this has led to networks identifying and developing specific diversity priorities within their regions and has increased the number of mutually beneficial partnerships developed with non-arts organisations. These factors have led to networks reaching a more diverse range of families in terms of ethnicity, language, disability and neurodiversity, economic deprivation, and household composition, through developing more accessible and equitable invitations to engage in cultural activity.

Network members have continued to develop different models of improving accessibility for families from lower socio-economic backgrounds, such as ‘Pay it Forward’ or ‘Pay What You Can’ ticketing models in the Bristol Network.

This greater understanding of family audiences has informed development of future Ambassador-led work in regional local Family Arts Networks, towards more detailed focus on specific underserved local family audiences.

Greater Collaboration within Networks

The programme has led to greater collaboration amongst network members, fostered by Ambassadors and evident through the range of joined-up working practices and project delivery taking place across regions. A key example of this was the ways in which members came together to develop and distribute art packs during the pandemic, using emergency funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Members have also co-developed festivals, events and conferences, and shared practices, resources and training opportunities within meetings.

Ambassadors have developed timelines to collate individual and collective strategic plans across their networks, which has ensured there is less duplication across regional offers and has enabled resources to go further through better identifying and addressing gaps.

“

... the programme... revitalised the network and created new potential for collaboration.

- Cumbria Lead Organisation

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“

The most significant change has been where the focus for the network has moved to. Originally this mainly sat within the marketing departments, but we have seen that over the years, the network has shifted to mainly learning departments...We are all wanting to find new ways of engaging with more diverse families and we are noticing the way to do that is not through marketing but through partnerships with non-arts-based organisations.

- Sunderland Ambassador

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Networks that were previously disconnected and unengaged are now re-energised as a result of the Ambassador programme and are keen to work together, rather than compete, to reach family audiences.

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Our new mission is: enable the North East cultural sector to be family-friendly, ensure family voices inform the sector's decision-making and remove barriers so that all families can connect with culture.

- North East Ambassador

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With the Manchester Network, we have this shared vision where we do want to share audiences...we have the same motivation.

- Manchester Network Member

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Momentum and Seed Funding

The consistent presence of Ambassadors since late 2019 and the activity that they have galvanised within their respective networks has encouraged organisations to prioritise families more than previously. This has been particularly important in light of the pressure that arts organisations face with reduced resources as a result of the pandemic's impact.

Due to a small underspend in the central programme budget, as a result of some Ambassadors being furloughed during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Campaign and funder agreed that this funding could be put towards collaborative network activity. Several of the Ambassadors noted that this additional budget for collaborative working was particularly beneficial and solidifying. The funding provided the Ambassadors with an opportunity to cultivate collaborative working within their networks, with resource to create something tangible in a creative context.

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Having a pot of money for Network activity without it all being voluntary for network members, this would have supported engagement and data gathering.

- Ambassador

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If there was something, even a small pot to work with. There's a reason, an output.

- Manchester Ambassador

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“

Our network members like momentum, they like things and projects to bring them together... I think going forwards... having some seed money to actually put training on for things or if they want to do community events... we want to be doing things and not just talking about things.

- Sunderland Ambassador

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Peer Support and Learning on a National Scale

Throughout the programme, Ambassadors have consistently emphasised the value of having a team of peers across the country and the central Campaign staff to share ideas, knowledge, and insights. This has supported Ambassadors' professional development and, in some cases, has increased their limited capacity by being able to exchange resources and best practice.

The model, operating on a national scale, with Ambassadors working regionally and then coming together at regular intervals, has been highly successful and a key strength of the programme.

The model has generated in-depth knowledge and understanding, with Ambassadors sharing practice, not only in terms of family arts engagement, but around building and sustaining a network. The breadth of the model has also given profile to the Ambassadors' work within their individual settings, as well as creating a ripple effect across the sector, with knowledge from one region being channelled through the Ambassador meetings and disseminated across others.



It's been brilliant to be part of this network with Ambassadors in other part of the country.

- Family Explorers North East Ambassador

I'm amazed when I get to meet everyone here. I leave these meetings feeling incredibly inspired. This is the bit that adds the extra inspiration and energy for me.

- Bristol Ambassador

Sometimes when you're running things on your own, it can feel really isolated. It's been an honest and supportive space to talk about the challenges as well as the successes.

- Sunderland Ambassador

It's amazing to feel like you're part of something national ... I'm part of something that's bigger than just Manchester.

- Manchester Ambassador



Appendix

Active Network Member Organisations (Aug 2022)

Bristol

Arnolfini
Artrageous
Blaise Museum
Bold Brave Drama / Creative Workspace
Bristol Archives
Bristol Arts Marketing
Bristol Beacon
Bristol Choral Society
Bristol Hippodrome
Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives
Bristol Old Vic
Bristol University Fun Palace
Brunel's SS Great Britain
Children's Scrapstore (Lead organisation)
Design West
DMAC UK – Dance Music Arts Collective
Flamingo Chicks
Georgian House
Happydings
Imayla
Let's Make Art
M Shed
Mismatch Theatre
Print
Royal West of England Academy
Spike Island
St George's
Tessa Bide Productions
The Churches Conservation Trust
The Georgian House Museum
Tobacco Factory Theatres
Travelling Light
Tyntesfield (National Trust)
Watershed
We The Curious

Cumbria

Brewery Arts Centre
Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Florence Arts Centre (Lead organisation)
Keswick Museum and Arts Gallery
Kirkgate Arts Centre
Lakeland Arts
Moorclose Community Centre
Prism Arts
Rosehill Theatre
Signal Film & Media
The Beacon Museum
The Gather Ennerdale
Theatre by the Lake
Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery
Workington Town Council

Derby

Artcore
Baby People
Deda
Derby Live
Derby Museums
Derby Theatre
QUAD (Lead organisation)
Sinfonia Viva

Manchester

Adoption Counts
Bridgewater Hall
Elizabeth Gaskell's House
HOME
Into Film
Longsight Library
Manchester Art Gallery
Manchester Central Library
Manchester Jewish Museum
Manchester Metropolitan University
Manchester Museum
Manchester South Central Foodbank
National Football Museum
One Manchester
People's History Museum
Stanley Grove Primary Academy
The Lowry (technically Salford)
The Pankhurst Centre
The Whitworth
Z-arts (Lead organisation)

North East

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art
Beamish Museum
Dance City
English Heritage North East: Belsay Hall, Castle & Gardens
English Heritage North East: Chesters Roman Fort & Museum
English Heritage North East: Corbridge Roman Town
English Heritage North East: Housesteads Roman Fort
English Heritage North East: Lindisfarne Priory
English Heritage North East: Prudhoe Castle
English Heritage North East: Tynemouth Priory
English Heritage North East: Warkworth Castle
Life Science Centre
Live Theatre
Museums Northumberland: Berwick Museum and Art Gallery
Museums Northumberland: Hexham Old Gaol
Museums Northumberland: Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum
Museums Northumberland: Woodhorn Museum
Newcastle Cathedral
Northern Stage
Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books
Stockton International Riverside Festival
Tees Valley Museums: Captain Cook Birthplace Museum
Tees Valley Museums: Dorman Museum
Tees Valley Museums: Hartlepool Art Gallery
Tees Valley Museums: Head of Steam, Darlington Railway Museum
Tees Valley Museums: Kirkleatham Museum
Tees Valley Museums: Museum of Hartlepool
Tees Valley Museums: Preston Park Museum & Grounds
The Bowes Museum
The Hullabaloo
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Arbeia
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Discovery Museum
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Great North Museum
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Hatton Gallery

North East (continued)

Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Laing Art Gallery
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Segedunum Roman Fort
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Shipley Art Gallery
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: South Shields Museum & Art Gallery
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums: Stephenson Steam Railway
Ushaw: Historic House, Chapel & Gardens

Sunderland

1719
Dance City Sunderland
Infinite Arts
More Than Grandparents
National Glass Centre
Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art (NGCA)
Sunderland Culture (lead organisation)
Sunderland Empire
Sunderland Libraries Service
Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens
The Bunker
Washington Arts Centre



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If you would like to find out more about the programme and future
opportunities, visit familyarts.co.uk/networks or email Anna Dever,
Executive Director at Family Arts Campaign on
anna.dever@thealbany.org.uk