Newcastle University’s Response to The British Academy Report: Covid 19 and Society, Children and Young People.
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Alison Atkinson-Phillips (Lecturer in Public History and formerly Research Associate with the Oral History Unit, Newcastle University) and Silvie Fisch (Associate Researcher, Oral History Unit, Newcastle University. Founder and Director of Northern Cultural Projects)

Since February 2018, Alison has been involved with a collaboration between the Oral History Unit (Newcastle University) and Northern Cultural Projects. Silvie and Alison worked on oral histories with the Newcastle West End Foodbank (Trussell Trust), interviewing clients and volunteers. This work has largely stopped since the pandemic hit. Since COVID-19, they have been working on a pilot project about mutual aid groups. This pilot project was funded internally through the Oral History Unit and they are now applying for external funding.

Challenges/Opportunities Pre-COVID-19
- Oral history gives people space to tell their own stories and can help to counteract the negative narratives about people living in poverty.
- Historians can bring their expertise to the current situation to help people realise that it is not inevitable and there are ways that things could be different.

Challenges/Opportunities since COVID-19
- It has not been possible to continue working on oral history with the foodbank because of the pressures on staff and volunteers, but also because many volunteers are vulnerable and have had to self-isolate. The foodbank was closed during lockdown so no contact with interviewees was possible.
- It took time to build up trust with people in the foodbank to share their stories, which will need to be rebuilt when it is possible to spend time at the foodbank again.
- There has been conflict between formal organisations such as the foodbank and informal groups such as mutual aid groups. One of the problems is that the foodbank operates under the Trussell Trust and therefore have to deal with rigid rules around referrals and the number of food parcels a person is allowed to receive.
- Mutual aid groups want to help people without referring them or having to ask them to interact with bureaucracy.
- COVID-19 has allowed them to interview a wide range of people for their pilot project on mutual aid through Zoom. This means that not all of the interviewees are from the North East, so they have been able to start building a picture at a more national level. It has allowed them to alter the scale of the project from a local case study to a more regional comparison.

Longer-term Challenges:
- Interconnection between deindustrialisation in the North East and the interaction between health and poverty needs to be thought through.
- Finding interdisciplinary methods to address these challenges effectively.
• Interventions need to be thought through. For example, creative projects need to make a positive difference to people’s lives.

Governance
• The relationship between local government and mutual aid groups needs to be looked at. National government recognises the role that communities play in the recovery from COVID-19, but the level of complexity in negotiating the relationship between local government, the informal volunteering sector such mutual aid groups, and the formal volunteering sector such as foodbanks needs to be better understood.
• Trust was already an issue. What emerged from the pilot interviews for the mutual aid project is support systems put in place by government, either at local or national level, did not work. The first lockdown did not help to build trust. A lot is contingent on individual actors, such as local councillors, and their ability to build trust.
• Some local governments are realising that they need to pass on power to communities as they know best.
• Local government have not always made use of local knowledge when trying to address issues.
• Local groups have been able to network and build resources.

Cohesion
• People got involved in volunteering who would not normally have done so, possibly because of being off work or on furlough. However, some of these people are now back at work or are exhausted which further reduces the capacity of organisations to help.

Inequalities
• It can be difficult for people to get the help they are entitled to e.g., it can be difficult to physically get to places such as foodbanks
• Dietary/religious/cultural needs are not always met.
• Economic inequalities in particular have been highlighted, as well as health and mental health.
• A common narrative in the interviews they have done is that the level of poverty took volunteers by surprise.

Further Material
Amanda Bailey (Director of the North East Child Poverty Commission)

Amanda is Director of the North East Child Poverty Commission, a stakeholder network of organisations and academics with an interest in working collaboratively to raise awareness of, and tackle, child poverty in the North East of England. The Commission was established in 2011 and, since 2019, has been hosted by – but is independent of – Newcastle University.

Challenges/Opportunities Pre-COVID-19

• Presenting research and evidence on child poverty in a user-friendly way to national, regional and local policymakers/policy influencers in order to achieve changes in policy and practice.

• Getting the issue of child poverty on to the domestic political agenda given the enormous number of competing issues facing policymakers/policy influencers was difficult, despite the significant growth in child poverty rates over the last few years.

• Challenging the view that addressing factors other than structural drivers (e.g. individual behaviour/personal characteristics rather than family income) are more important in tackling child poverty.

Current Challenges/Opportunities

• For the worst of reasons, child poverty is now back on the political agenda and public attitudes appear to have started to shift as a result of the pandemic (with Marcus Rashford’s high-profile campaigning in this area helping with this change).

• More people are coming into contact with the social security system (Universal Credit etc) who previously did not need it, and are experiencing its shortfalls/appreciating the importance of a strong social security safety net.

• The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on people who were already facing significant disadvantage and inequality (e.g. financially, in terms of health outcomes and with challenges such as home schooling), and is likely to have both increased the number of children living in poverty and the level of hardship experienced by those already living below the poverty line.

• The pandemic has also highlighted issues that were actually longstanding challenges – such as food insecurity when out of school and digital exclusion for children and young people. We need sustainable and dignified solutions to these issues, rather than undignified, sticking plaster responses such as emergency food parcels, in the longer term.

Short-term Challenges

• For the work of the Commission/the way it functions as a network, a key challenge is that almost all the organisations involved have spent the last few months firefighting and dealing with an enormous increase in their workloads – will they still have the capacity to be fully engaged with the Commission’s work?
At the same time as they are facing increased demand, many organisations also have diminished capacity (e.g. as a result of furloughed staff, staff ill or isolating and, for charities, a significant reduction in their usual fundraising / income streams).

Longer-term Challenges

- Ensuring that the emergency/crisis responses of the pandemic – such as food aid – are not normalised as policy responses to child poverty in the long term.
- Making the case for investment in the social security system, and the services that children and young people use, rather than cutbacks after significant levels of Government spending during the pandemic.
- Getting governmental acknowledgement of child poverty, the definition of poverty, and whose responsibility it is to tackle it.
- Showing that poverty is not an individual issue but a structural one. Investment into the long term will do more to help alleviate poverty, rather than short-term funding or piecemeal policy responses.

Governance

- Throughout the pandemic there has been a sense that local expertise and knowledge has not been listened to at a national level.
- Many issues appear to have been micromanaged centrally – leads to certain areas of the country being worse off than others.
- Beyond the pandemic, all parts of Government need to acknowledge that 'levelling up' needs to be about people and joining the dots between social and economic policy, understanding that investment in social infrastructure and people is just as important as investment in physical infrastructure.
- Whilst most levers that could address child poverty are held by national government, devolution must also benefit children in poverty in the North East.¹

Cohesion

- The pandemic has strengthened community relations in many areas – e.g., mutual aid groups established, though this is dependent on people having the time, capacity, and resources (e.g., easy access to internet) to establish these groups.
- Community groups have perhaps also made it easier for people to ask for help.

Inequalities

- High number of jobs in the North East are in manufacturing, retail, and social care, which cannot be done from home, so it is harder for people to protect themselves – potentially widening pre-existing inequalities between regions.

like the North East and elsewhere Those in low paid, insecure work are also much less able to self-isolate.

- The disadvantage gap in education is likely to have significantly widened – e.g., due to not being able to easily access online learning/afford other home learning resources/not having the space at home to learn.
- We also know that BAME communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID in terms of health as well as economically\(^2\) and this is particularly concerning given that 46% of children from Black and minority ethnic groups were growing up in poverty nationally even before the pandemic.

It is important that working towards solutions involves working with local people directly, rather than academics or different layers of government, for example, telling people what they need to do/imposing policies on people We need to address poverty working alongside those with lived experience (e.g. the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and APLE Collective do extensive work on this).

Ben Dickenson was Executive Producer of City of Dreams from 2017-2020, which is a 10-year initiative, launching in 2018, involving 52 partners from across the arts and culture sector; its aim is to provide opportunities for young people (under 25s) to take part in cultural and creative activities that will boost their confidence and skills. City of Dreams was initiated and led by NewcastleGateshead Cultural Venues (www.ngcv.org.uk), a group of 10 large cultural organisations running 23 venues who work together in the interests of the sector. Following consultation with young people across Newcastle and Gateshead, in 2019, City of Dreams (www.cityofdreams.org.uk) created a 3-year strategy to provide these opportunities and to make Newcastle and Gateshead the best place to be young. So far, City of Dreams and its NGCV partners has created 428,000 opportunities for young people to be involved in creative arts participation ranging from a 12-week film course to single arts workshops.

Challenge to cultural participation due to COVID-19 for young people.

- The 3-year strategy launched in 2019 is now redundant.
- Limitation of arts participation for young people during main lockdown because large arts organisations furloughed their staff and closed their doors.
- Organisations are scaling back their work with young people due to loss of revenue.
- Loss of creative arts practitioners who are experienced in working with young people.
- Won’t know complete impact of COVID-19 on partners or City of Dreams until April (next financial year), but they know they cannot deliver what they intended.

Youth Unemployment - Economic Inequalities

- More limited employment/training opportunities for young people in the arts sector due to ongoing social distancing measures; venues are reliant on ticket sales.
- The arts sector has been one of the hardest hit by COVID-19.
- Arts sector income in the region is down 40%; in 2016, the arts sector in the north east generated £400 million (£203 million Gross Value Added) and employed approx. 2,450 people.

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Rising young unemployment will create more competition for any jobs that do arise in the arts sector. Youth unemployment nationally has risen between September and November 2020, and now stands at 344,435.\(^4\)

There is a loss of skills and training for young people in arts sector due to rising unemployment generally creating more competition for jobs.

**Challenges to consider - Digital Engagement**

- Who is accessing it? At present, it is impossible for organisations to know who is accessing digital content.
- From Ben’s personal experience of trying to track who was accessing his online content during lockdown: 1) it was difficult to evaluate who was engaging; 2) where it was possible to trace engagement, it was largely people who were already creatively engaged with the arts.

**Opportunities arising from COVID-19**

New ways of working have emerged from the Covid-19 lockdown due to partners innovating. This has brought many arts and cultural organisations into contact with far more diverse communities than they would engage with at the venue. For example, Streetgames is a strategic partnership that developed during lockdown between the voluntary and community sector and arts organisations combining holiday hunger interventions with creative participation. Due to the need to engage audiences in open spaces, some organisations have reached far more diverse groups of children and young people than previously. For example, Dance City, based in Newcastle, held outdoor community dance sessions in the street.

**Sustainability – Partnerships**

It has become apparent how important partnerships are between arts, cultural, and community organisations. Without these partnerships, arts and cultural venues would have struggled to engage with diverse children and young people, particularly from disadvantaged communities. How to develop these partnerships going forward offers opportunities and difficulties for arts organisations:

- How do arts organisations become community organisations? How do they achieve this without impacting on other activities that they rely on for ticket sales?
- What can the arts sector and the voluntary community sector learn from their experiences of working together during lockdown? How can these successful practices be embedded in the long term?

• If the voluntary community sector goes under, due to lack of funding, how will City of Dreams and arts organisations generally reach diverse communities of young people?
• ‘if the vital organisations that connect arts organisations get left behind, that’s frightening.’
Dr Bruce Davenport and Dr Katie Markham (Research Associates, School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University)

At the time of writing, Katie and Bruce had submitted a bid to AHRC titled “Rethinking museums as a place for diversifying cultural citizenship in pre-school children”.

Bruce works on museums, galleries, and heritage. He works on a range of projects which are largely about the effects of cultural engagement. Most of this has focused on older people, though he has experience of working with children and this new bid focuses on children as well as cultural citizenship.

Katie works on identities, heritage, and tourism in post-conflict spaces. Her work on the current bid focuses on cultural citizenship and behaviours in children, particularly through the lens of diversity. She also works on critical race theory.

Challenges and Opportunities Pre-COVID-19

- Methodologically there are issues around working with pre-school children.
- Museums are not always very diverse in terms of visitorship - diversity is an angle that the proposed project looks at. One potential issue is recruiting different groups into the study. The northeast is not as diverse as other areas of the country.
- Interdisciplinary - not all subjects that could be are represented on the project because of funding limitations.
- Partnership with museums brings both challenges and opportunities. These organisations have their own agendas and priorities which need to fit together with the research. There needs to be an outcome/ impact/ sustainable change.
- Museums are generally enthusiastic, but they need to get something out of it rather than just being a case study.
- Museums are working under their own indicators and funding limitations. Small museums can be working under more constraints that researchers have to fit within.

Short-term Challenges and Opportunities

- Everything got locked down. Many staff were on furlough which made it difficult to talk to museum partners.
- If they get the funding, they will not be able to start data-gathering before 12 months. Will lockdowns still be happening? Will COVID-19 be affecting the data at that point? These questions need to be taken into account and planned for.
- What will the early years spaces that they want to study look like? These used to be spaces that could get very busy, but now social distancing means that cannot happen. The same applies to how children interact with objects under the new regulations.
• One museum pulled out of being a case study because of staffing and resourcing issues.
• How will museums continue to function over the next couple of years? That will shape how researchers are able to interact with them.
• Will their methods have to change?
• How will they go about doing the research? For example, behavioural experiments may take more time because of social distancing – it will take longer to collect data/run experiments.
• One of our working assumptions is that other visitors’ behaviour will alter families’ behaviours in the museum. This changes again through social distancing.
• COVID-19 has shifted behavioural expectations. Will COVID-19 change visiting conventions?

**Longer-term Challenges and Opportunities**

• How will they present this research without making it about COVID-19?
• REF 2028 – the project has to be designed to capture impact for REF 2028. What constitutes that impact and how do they track it in a COVID-19 world?
• The idea of legacy is challenged: Bruce & Katie were aware of venues where staff have been laid off and they anticipate that when venues re-open new staff will be brought in. Staff learning would normally turn into practice, but if staff leave that impact potentially leaves with them. There is, arguably, a positive aspect to this, as they will take that learning into new roles and new venues, but it creates a challenge - how can this be tracked?
• If we end up in a post-COVID-19 world, how will this research and its recommendations be relevant to that world?
• Much of the impact work happens at the end of/after the project - how do you continue involvement of those who contributed? Follow-on funding?

**Governance**

• There were vague policies around which sites in the cultural industry could/could not open. Very little guidance was given about how to reopen.
• National policies around support and furlough for cultural sector has been uneven.
• Austerity was already a problem but has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Museums have been adapting to this for the past decade.
• Potential for further austerity

**Cohesion**

• Loss of volunteers (often older people, e.g., National Trust).
• Activities delivered by freelancers might not continue – which will affect the wider ecology of museums and COVID-19.
• Composition of visitors varies from place to place - museums need to respond and reach out to local communities.
Inequalities

- There is increasing reliance on alternative sources of revenue apart from Local Authority funding, e.g., exhibitions, how will this be affected by COVID-19? Probably geographic inequalities will become apparent, which then shapes what they can offer for local children and what impact they can have.
- Effects of COVID-19 on ways in which people use public transport. Will people stop coming because of the risk? Middle-class people will come by car – which will create further class division.

Role of Humanities/Social Sciences

- Museums can continue to offer themselves as a space which is different to everything else (not school/work/home). Lots of activities available to families in museums which can, in theory, continue. It is unclear whether museums will have to work to get visitors back, or whether people will seek them out having lived under restrictions for so long. Lots of venues have been responding to Covid-19 through offering more online. They have been exploring what they can do in this area both as a means of revenue generation and as a means of maintaining relationships with visitors.
- This project can help museums to make a case for themselves and what they can offer – they can offer the nuances that can impact practice, which museums may not have the resources to look at themselves. Humanities and social sciences can offer critical ways to improve practice and help cultural organisations to be relevant and important.

Useful resources:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey#how-to-access-survey-data
Greta became interested in the effects of breakfast on children’s cognition about 20 years ago and has since researched school breakfast clubs and their social, health and educational impact on children. She became interested in holiday hunger (defined in 2017) and what happens to children from low-income households during the school holidays when free school meals and unavailable. Such programmes are now referred to as Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programmes because they don’t just provide food e.g., they provide physical, cultural, and educational activities for children and parents alongside referral services (e.g., debt advice, housing, health) within their local community. Recently, Greta has begun to research food insecurity and mental well-being in HE students. Professor Defeyter has conducted multiple projects pre- and post-Covid 19. Below are two examples of project conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Holiday Activities and Food (HAF)**

**Challenges/Opportunities Current**

- On 20\textsuperscript{th} March 2020, schools across the UK closed their doors to all but the most vulnerable pupils and children of key workers (Defeyter, von Hippel et al., 2020).
- In addition to concerns about learning loss (Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017), mental health, there was widespread concern about the impact of school closures on household food insecurity, especially for those children in receipt of free school meals.
- The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) reported a 177\% increase in independent food bank use comparing May 2019 with May 2020.
- Similarly, the Trussell Trust recorded an 89\% increase in use, comparing April 2019 with April 2020 with a 107\% increase in the distribution of food parcels to children (Trussell Trust, 2020).
- In 2020 the English government committed £9.1M to support 50,000 children across the school holidays through the DfE’s HAF programme, lending additional support to food security for children during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- However, due to Covid-19 and rules about social distancing etc., the delivery of holiday activity programmes had to be adapted.

**Project: Covid-19 Local Authority, holiday club coordinator, and parent survey**

- During the Covid-19 pandemic the Healthy Living Lab at Northumbria University quickly switched to online data collection methods to collect the views of local authorities, holiday club coordinators and parents about HAF
delivery during Covid-19. This study is currently being written up for publication. Generally, the findings of the study showed that face-to-face activities in numerous holiday club venues were no longer possible, and parents were facing more isolation because of the loss of the school support network over the holidays. Where face-to-face activities were possible, clubs had to consider social distancing guidelines and other public health measures (e.g., handwashing, ventilation, wearing of face masks). A number of holiday programmes switched to online provision through online discussion groups, online physical activities, and online cooking programmes.

- **Short-term Challenges**
  - The delivery of HAF programmes in 2021 will be somewhat dependent on the English government’s timetable for easing lockdown, though some local authorities will be able to use their learning from 2020.
  - Whilst the DfE has significantly increased the funding for HAF, an investment of £220M in 2021 across all 152 higher tier local authorities, this significant expansion of HAF in terms of geographic reach and the increase of provision in each location has generated a number of challenges for local authorities.

- **Long-term Challenges**
  - Many NGOs and charities are calling for a review of school food programmes. Such a review should incorporate holiday activity and food programmes, and before and after school programmes and align to the National Food Strategy.

**Project: Food Insecurity in Higher Education Students**

The impact of Covid-19 on mental wellbeing and health of university students is a growing concern. Many students rely on part-time employment to fund their studies and living expenses and the sectors in which students normally work (e.g., hospitality) were some of the first sectors to be ‘hit’ due to lockdown. In this project the Healthy Living Lab collaborated with colleagues from Sheffield University, City University London, Ulster University, and Oklahoma State University to research university student mental wellbeing, food insecurity, and the role of institutional trust (specifically trust in universities and the government) during the pandemic. An online survey of 600 students enrolled in universities across the UK found that trust is correlated with mental wellbeing but is also shaped by food and housing insecurity, social and economic circumstances. The findings of this study, alongside policy recommendations, have recently been accepted for publication (Defeyter et al., 2021).

**Further sources of information:**


Dr Hazel Sheeky Bird (Newcastle University – Research Associate, School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics, Children’s Literature Unit)

Hazel is a research associate based in Newcastle University’s Children’s Literature Unit working on the archives of Aidan and Nancy Chambers with Seven Stories. She has also been working on additional projects with Seven Stories to engage with children and young people, particularly focusing on schools, reading, and sharing archives. She has a background in children’s literature and was a secondary school teacher before pursuing her PhD.

**Project: ‘Unpacking the Archive’ (pre-COVID-19) - funded through Newcastle University’s Faculty Impact Fund**

Collaborative project with the Seven Stories Creative Learning and Engagement team drawing upon the Aidan and Nancy Chambers archive held by Seven Stories. This was a 10-week archival-based project that engaged 20 Year 9 students from Walker Riverside Academy, which is an area with multiple indicators of deprivation. The ten sessions employed a range of games and drama exercises to boost the students’ confidence and were structured around close reading and archival activities to develop knowledge and exploration of the archive. Students received material handling training and original material from the Seven Stories' Collection was taken into the school each week. The students completed a portfolio of work to gain the Bronze Arts Award and undertook co-curation with Seven Stories’ Senior Curator, Gillian Rennie, developing material for a new gallery space in the visitor centre.

Impact of archival engagement on young people (data taken from final project evaluation carried out by Hazel):

**Capacity of humanities to impact positively on children and young people’s well-being.**

**Feedback from final project evaluation (unpublished):** 94% of students felt more confident handling archival material. ‘We know that when we work in partnership with Seven Stories we can develop and deliver arts-based enrichment experiences that positively impact the lives of children young people. For example, before starting the archive project at Walker Riverside Academy, we asked the students to complete a LawSeq self-esteem questionnaire, which is a self-reporting survey on self-esteem. Some of the scores returned by the students evidenced extremely low levels of self-esteem and self-worth. At the end of the project, all of the students who completed the programme, which was 18 out of the 20, expressed a desire to engage with more archives and to continue working with Seven Stories. But, it was the qualitative feedback that was interesting. When asked what they were most proud of in terms of what they’d done, overwhelmingly the responses referred to increased confidence and pride in what they’d achieved, which of course impacts positively on self-esteem and well-being. So we know, that when we collaborate with partners such as Seven Stories, using the literary archive and drawing upon all of our expertise, we can positively impact the well-being of children and young people.’
• 94% of students enjoyed the sessions
• 88% wanted to continue their engagement with material from the Seven Stories archive

When asked what they were proud of doing:
  • ‘Sharing my ideas. Becoming more confident’
  • ‘For how confident I was talking to others’
  • ‘I’m so confident of how my confidence has been boosted and how much work I’ve done.’
  • ‘I am most proud of helping the exhibition in Seven Stories.’

Community and Belonging
  • Walker is one of Seven Stories’ doorstep neighbourhoods, yet few of the students had ever been to the visitor centre prior to the project.
  • The continued closure of the Seven Stories’ visitor centre means that the students’ curatorial voices still have not been heard via the exhibition, and so the students’ connection with a doorstep arts organisation has ground to a halt.

Negative impacts of COVID-19
  • A key outcome for the students would have been a Bronze Arts Award. Seven Stories arranged for these to be assessed along with others from the Baltic. Both organisations were closed during the main lockdown and extensively furloughed staff. 12-months later these portfolios have still not been assessed.
  • Loss of connection with the students. How can that connection be rebuilt? The students involved with the archive project showed real interest in continuing to work with archival material, but what happens now that that connection is lost?

Continuing barriers to engaging with young people
  • Handling the archival material, and gaining material handling training, was a big part of the project. It would need additional time and funding to transfer this to a digital format.
  • It is extremely unlikely that Walker Riverside Academy will be willing to give up curriculum time for engagement activities during the school day as they are under pressure to catch students up. We know that the education of children from disadvantaged backgrounds was disproportionately impacted by the lockdown.\(^5\) This will make it very

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difficult for teachers to give up class time to anything that does not directly and measurably impact on educational attainment.

- Shifting projects like this to after school is not an answer as it can be self-selecting.
- Ongoing social distancing and the maintenance of ‘bubbles’ means that it isn’t possible for visitors to go into schools at present.

Opportunities arising from COVID-19

- The project demonstrated on a small-scale that working with archival materials enabled the students to engage critically with writing processes and built confidence and self-esteem. Given the wide-spread pivot to online engagement during lockdown, there is an opportunity to learn from best practice over this period, and to collaborate with the school and Seven Stories to develop digital archival engagement that meets their curriculum needs and continues to enrich their engagement with literature, creative practice, and personal well-being.

Project: ‘Enjoying Reading Together’ (present) - Funded by Newcastle University’s Impact Acceleration Fund.

The project aimed to develop the capacity of Brighton Avenue Primary School, in Bensham Gateshead, to create and sustain a culture of reading for pleasure among its students and their families. Reading for pleasure being widely acknowledged to have a positive impact on future life chances, and shared family reading being a recognised foundation for building this. Bensham is an area of high deprivation; Brighton Avenue Primary has 324 children on role which includes: 59% pupil premium, 41% eligible for free school meals, 34% children with EAL and 20% with special educational needs. Working with Seven Stories, the intention was to deliver a range of creative reading engagement activities for students and families, along with CPD for staff, leading to a sustainable family reading programme that the school would run in collaboration with Gateshead Central Library, which is a 5 minute walk from the school.

Ongoing barriers


• This project can’t go ahead until social distancing is no longer required. Brighton Avenue Primary’s COVID-19 secure health and safety plan does not allow visitors into the school.

• Gateshead Central Library can’t support any extended or group visits. At present (20 November) the library is closed once again; after the main lockdown individuals can visit the library for 15 min only.

• The project is been rewritten, but Hazel is concerned about how it can still be meaningful to the participants and to Seven Stories in a new format.

• Having missed 5 months of school, there will be more pressure on teachers to help children catch-up. Brighton Avenue Primary are summatively assessing their children in December.

• After school clubs are still not running – maintaining ‘bubbles’ makes this currently impossible for the school, so the programme can’t just switch to running outside of school hours.

Opportunities for this project

• The project is currently being reworked to focus on using digital engagement to boost reading for pleasure across the school. Seven Stories have successfully pivoted their Authors into Schools programme to the digital (see interview with John Beattie and Sarah Cotton: Seven Stories).

Relevance of creating a culture of reading for pleasure – health and wellbeing

• We know that children who read for pleasure are predicted better success in life than those who don’t. According to the OECD, reading enjoyment is more important for children’s educational success than the social class of their parents.⁷

• Reading for pleasure has a range of health benefits, including mental well-being, for children and young people and these were apparent during the main lockdown.⁸

Ongoing inequalities in access to books

• We know that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to go to a school that doesn’t have a school library, and that there are disparities in school library provision across the four British nations.⁹

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https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Mental_wellbeing_reading_and_writing_2017-18_-_FINAL2_qTxyxvg.pdf


https://d824397c-0ce2-4fc6-b5c4-8d2e4de5b242.filesusr.com/ugd/8d6dfb_a1949ea011cd415fbd57a7a0c4471469.pdf
We also know that foodbank use is on rise,\textsuperscript{10} which means in all likelihood that some families will decide they can’t afford to buy their children reading books.\textsuperscript{11}

Gateshead Central Library didn’t re-open until 8\textsuperscript{th} September, 2020: the day after term started for the Autumn term.\textsuperscript{12} Even then, it is only open for 15 min visits, and rhyme time and story times aren’t possible due to social distancing.


Dr Heather Smith (Senior Lecturer, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University)

Heather wrote a bid for UKRI funding for a project titled 'Initial Teacher Education to mitigate racial inequities in education exacerbated by COVID-19 and to develop sustainable practices for the future'. This did not receive funding, but it is now commissioned by the National Education Union. The project aims to find out what Initial Teacher Education (ITE/T) providers have on their courses to address race equality, and to then devise an anti-racism framework for all ITE/T providers based on research evidence in the field and with resources from current providers. This is essential as there is currently no requirement to focus on anti-racism in ITE/T in England, and no current set of research-informed guidance and resource material.

**Challenges/Opportunities**

- 25% of BAME pupils are entitled to Free School Meals, which is an overrepresentation of this group. BAME communities have also been hit the hardest by COVID-19 in terms of the impacts on health and bereavement, leading to further mental and physical health problems.
- There are suggested restrictions as to what can be taught on the school curriculum, which as some ITE/T provision is based in schools will also impact ITE/T. The women and equalities minister, Kemi Badenoch, recently told Parliament that teachers ought not to use material produced by the Black Lives Matter Movement and that Critical Race Theory will be banned. Badenoch stated that “the government stands unequivocally against critical race theory” (quoted in Shande-Baptiste 2020). This conflation of theory and ideology is purposeful and means that schools are under pressure not to teach about racism in ways that could have an impact on society. (See also ‘Open Letter – Don’t Divide Us’ which cites the 1996 Education Act about maintaining political neutrality in education and expressed concerns about the promotion of ‘a politicised “critical race theory” agenda’ and, more recently, Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report (2021), led by Tony Sewell, in which institutional racism is denied).
- This comes alongside the monitoring by OFSTED of Fundamental British Values in both the teacher standards and what schools have to teach. Fundamental British Values are taken from the definition of extremism within counter-terrorism legislation (and so are not politically neutral). Nothing in education can be completely politically neutral.
- Over the years, there has been a de-racialisation of education in public and education policy. There is no reference to race, racism, or ethnicity in the teacher standards. The Core Content Framework (a compulsory document for teacher educators) has no reference to racism, discrimination, or pupils with English as an additional language.
- BAME pupils are less likely to get into Russell Group universities. There are patterns of proportional underachievement from primary school onwards in these groups.
The Newly Qualified Teacher survey has changed the language of its questions, e.g., it now asks how prepared they feel to teach pupils from all ethnic backgrounds, rather than specifying BAME. Last year, only 53% said they felt prepared to teach pupils from all ethnic backgrounds. The problem with this is that everyone has an ethnic background, it might as well say ‘all children’, and so it denies the fact that some groups do better than others.

Figures of acceptance rates onto teacher training courses in 2019 showed that the rate of acceptance for White men was almost double that for Black men. The people doing the interviewing are predominantly white. In 2019, there were only 285 black men accepted onto teacher training courses in the UK.

Unconscious bias implies that we are unaware of them, rather than facing them and interrogating them. Joyce King’s expression ‘dysconscious’ bias is a more useful term. Stereotypes of Black men are preventing Black men, and particularly young Black men, from being accepted into the teaching profession. Furthermore, black teachers are far less likely to be promoted. 97% of primary school headteachers are white. Nothing is known about the economic backgrounds of those applying for teaching, so it is unclear whether COVID-19 will impact these figures. Research (America and UK) suggests that racism is a reason why fewer black people apply for teaching in the first place.

New PSHE curriculum mentions the word ‘discrimination’, but includes statutory guidance forbidding schools from using certain materials, mirroring Kemi Badenoch’s speech to parliament.

Challenges since COVID-19

COVID-19 disproportionately affects people from BAME backgrounds – are black teachers being given a choice about returning to teach in schools? Will COVID-19 affect the numbers of black teachers in schools longer-term?

Increased prevalence of overt racism. This comes at the same time as methods that could be useful to prevent racism are being denounced by the government.

Those from poorer backgrounds have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Outreach work (e.g., from universities) has been affected by COVID-19, but with these restrictive policies it is going to be even harder. Organisations such Show Racism the Red Card receive a lot of interest from schools (https://www.theredcard.org/).

Heather gave the example of a letter sent from Richard Avenue Primary School (written by the headteacher) which racially stereotyped Bangladeshi pupils and their families and blamed them for spreading COVID-19.
Additional Information:

‘Open Letter – Don’t Divide Us’, sent to all headteachers from Don’t Divide Us, 16.09.2020.


Dr Helen Wareham (Research Associate, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University)

Helen’s background is in data analysis which usually involves looking at social inequalities and young people. She is a research associate on the European-funded SEED project (Social InEquality and its Effects on Child Development: A study of birth cohorts in the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands) which uses data from the Millennium Cohort Study to track children born in 2000 until now. She also works for the social equality charity, The Bridge Group, which looks at social equality, diversity, career progression etc.

Challenges prior to Covid:

- Engagement, particularly with regard to policy. Social mobility is on the political agenda, but often only for a small group of people rather than improving opportunities for a wider range of people.
- There are problems engaging policy makers. Charities and organisations are often interested and it is never off the political agenda, but it is not a high enough priority to do anything about.
- The problems are at government level. Had initial contact but then limited engagement with Social Mobility Commission.
- Policy makers are interested in the idea that early years education is linked to social mobility but the pay-off/results aren’t immediate - the necessary investment does not work with the political cycle.

Challenges/opportunities post-Covid:

- For the SEED project, they did not initially incorporate Covid-related data into research (as they knew other people were working with Covid data early on) but it is now a consideration of their workstreams - SEED are looking at it from a longer perspective.
- Working and linking with Covid-related data allows them to raise these issues (inequality and impact of Covid, etc.) again.

Short-term challenges:

- SEED project has had funding extended until June 2021 but beyond that is unknown.
- Difficulties in knowing how to frame work for future grants in what is a more competitive market.
- Brexit. It is unclear how the UK will be able to bid for funding. It might be treated like associate countries (e.g. America, Australia) and so not have access to as much money.
- In Helen’s other work with The Bridge Group, they have seen an increase in work. Covid has allowed some organisations the time to think and look at data about equality and diversity. There have been lots of requests for research studies to be done.
Longer-term challenges:

- SEED project - despite the end of the funding, the data is publicly available through the UK data service so will remain to be analysed by researchers.
- There are hopes that some of the momentum gained by organisations will continue so that the knock-on effects of Covid can be addressed, e.g. outreach programmes.
- Fixed-term contracts are incredibly hindering. It is difficult to embed yourself within a research community when you know it is only fixed-term. It also carries the risk of continuing to produce research after the job has finished, meaning the researcher works on papers/publications in their spare time, or has to pass up opportunities for sharing research (e.g. conferences) because the contract has ended.
- How will data be shared? The Millennium Cohort Study is available for international researchers to access but it is unclear what the legislation will be around data sharing in the future.

Other issues (e.g. scale, time).

- The SEED project was well put together and had funding over a few years, meaning that Helen’s post was for 3 years which allowed her to embed herself in the data and the research community.
- Longer-term projects give job security and allow more complex analysis to be done.
- Helen acts as an independent consultant on an additional project in ECLS which is based around nursery-aged children. Data collection was started but has been on hold for 9 months.
  - The nurseries have continued to stay in touch and are eager to participate in the research as they know it will be beneficial to the children.

Cohesion:

- Covid has brought some sectors together, but others have been more divisive (e.g. education)

Inequalities:

- Inequalities have been exacerbated. There is concern for children in the nursery project - how far behind will they have fallen? This is particularly pertinent for those with lower speech and language skills in the first place, who are the children that the project is aimed at.
- Access to internet.
- Pausing of national data collection. Children did not sit GCSEs, SATs, etc, and this will lead to a gap in the data. This data gap is also affecting things like the gender pay gap as companies did not have to submit data. Potential long-term issues could arise for young people caught in this data gap.
Sources of Information

Helen has shared the document below which is a European Commission document. They were asked to consult on this document for Early Childhood Education and amendments were made based on their work and suggestions.


SEED’s funder, Dial/Norface, organised a series of meetings which allowed them to speak directly with staff at the Commission. Summary in link below:

https://dynamicsofinequality.org/second-dial-eu-stakeholder-meeting-overcoming-childhood-disadvantages/

The Bridge Group and ESMA worked together to produce a review and summary of inequalities over life course (Helen worked on the early years section)

https://esma.community/life-stage-research/
Professor Law has a background in linguistics and speech and language therapy specifically with relation to children. He spoke of three projects that had been influenced by the process of lockdown in early 2020. He also directs the European-funded SEED project (Social InEquality and its Effects on Child Development: A study of birth cohorts in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands).

**Project One**

The first one, funded by the Nuffield foundation and delivered by Newcastle University, University College London and Oxford University, is a funded trial which was due to run for 2.5 years. The trial is of an intervention called Talking Time designed to promote preschool children’s oral language skills, an area of considerable concern to schools and parents alike. The schools were selected because they were in the lowest quintile of IDACI scores – a measure based on postcode. The intervention consists of training up teachers to support the children in their class and includes a series of specific activities to promote vocabulary and narrative skills which will be common to all schools. Children are recruited through their classes but the intervention is what is known as “universal” in that it is available to all children rather than “targeted” on specific subgroups of children.

They had collected data on 800 children in London and Teesside and were about to start the intervention stage (training teachers to interact effectively with children to improve their oral language skills) when COVID-19 hit. The schools chosen were in lower socio-economic backgrounds, and so lower literacy levels were expected which has long term consequences for engagement in education, mental health, and engagement with the arts and cultural world.

What happened?

Due to COVID-19, the trial was stopped but the project team submitted a report and the Nuffield have agreed to restart the project in July 2021 by which time it will be possible to recruit schools and the first children will be seen in September 2021 although largely online for their assessments using tele-practice while the intervention will be delivered in the classroom by the teacher. In the meantime, materials and the package of training for the teachers have both been modified in anticipation of the changes. Of particular concern this project concerns the kind of children who won’t necessarily engage in school activities. Schools tried to engage with families, but lots of families don’t have laptops or if they do it is shared across a number of people in the household. They may use their phone as an alternative, but are always vulnerable to problems of signal and credit.

Some children have been without education for 6 months and these children will not be ready for school. It will take a long time to catch up and this may depend on a

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range of factors including parental motivation and is the challenge of delivering the curriculum and getting children to catch up and of course “the language skills of the children affect how well the children integrate into the classroom.”

It is anticipated that we will be able to link the data from the included children to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) data collected at five years to find out how the children progress once they have completed the intervention.

**Challenges**

As with all projects in schools, this one simply stopped in March 2020 and effectively this meant that all data collection had to cease and the project effectively folded and no further data were collected on the children.

**Opportunities**

Contact was retained with schools and a training webinar was offered to support them.

The Nuffield Foundation proved a very responsive funder and we were able to negotiate the start of a new project in 2021.

As part of the work we have been carrying out in the meantime we have devised methods for online training and assessment of the children which we would not have done before but in the medium to longer term may make the intervention more sustainable.

**Project 2**

Professor Law and his team have been working on a review of the literature related to the use of tele-practice when delivering services for children with language learning difficulties. The aim of this project is to influence the development of national guidance for speech and language therapists providing support to children. The key here is that in March 2020, tele-practice which had tended to be confined to work in geographically remote areas prior to this point sudden went on-line with very little underpinning evidence of its value. This review has now been peer reviewed and accepted for publication.

**Challenges**

Tele-practice has, to date, largely been confined to geographically remote areas. Suddenly it became the norm but the evidence underpinning such a shift was not available.

**Opportunities**

This review is driven by the need to address this and will feed into a much wider debate on the topic (relating to the point made above about digital inclusion). It provided new opportunities for collaboration between contributors (two of whom were in Austria and France) to the review not available hitherto.

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Project 3: Professor Law is working with Public Health England to produce a measure for screening children’s language and social skills when they attend for their 24-30 month developmental reviews.\textsuperscript{15} Data on 800 children were collected in five sites in England. The collection of the data were largely completed once the COVID-19 regulations were introduced and the analysis has been completed during lock down. This project will lead to webinar training for all health visitors in England starting in December 2020 but the key issue here is that this check at 24-30 months was largely halted during the lock down and Public Health England are very keen to get this started again potentially with the measure being delivered online. Again, we will be able to follow up these children as they go through into school to see whether being identified at this early age made a difference to their later development.

Challenges
There were some challenges associated with the curtailment of data collection but the key issue here is that most of these developmental checks simply stopped. Inevitably this restricted contact between health visitors and families.

Opportunities
As the changes resulting from the lock down have reduced practitioners have gone back to seeing parents but often this has remained “remote”. The measure we have developed is readily transferred into this sort of delivery mechanism. And this will be incorporated into the nationwide training to start imminently. The training profile would have been very different without the lock down.

Impact of COVID-19 on communities and relationships within communities:

- “People are overworking” – the changes brought about by COVID-19 are having a dramatic effect on the way that people are working and those changes commonly require a lot of additional time and resource from the practitioners and their organisations.
- Fears communities will be “severely strained” by January with absenteeism caused by low level mental health.
- Teachers and health visitors very keen to restore “normality” to the services that they deliver because of their commitment to the wellbeing of the children and their families.
- Academic community:
  - Conferences not going ahead.
  - Lack of travel and networking - more problematic for younger academics

• But people do seek out communities, e.g. gave keynote online which attracted over 600 people, would have been 150 in person.
• Thinking about new projects/collaborations is harder without in-person community.
Summary

I spoke to Janice McLaughlin about her work with disabled children and organisations that support them including a recent project with Investing in Children, which is a children’s rights organisation that works with children who have experienced care, the criminal justice system, etc. We spoke about the impact of the Coronavirus Act 2020 on children and young people and disabled people in terms of losing provisions during the main lockdown, continuing patchy educational provision, all of which impact on health and well-being. Janice said that this understanding was based on discussion that she was participating in rather than empirical evidence that is not there yet.

Inequalities

- The Coronavirus Act, which passed through parliament easily, took away Local Authority statutory requirements to provide things such as SEN education. In practice, the LAs have not used this provision to a significant degree, but Janice's observation was that “LAs, if they can avoid doing things in a context where they don't have any money, if the law doesn't say they must do it, then they'll stop doing it.”
- “accounts we’re seeing through disability organisations are about families really struggling because things like respite care, day services, afterschool clubs, all the things that went with lockdown and that haven't been brought back in. And in that sense, families are feeling that they can no longer really trust the provisions that are there for them.”
- On future research, and working with partners, it would be interesting to look at which organisations are able to innovate and adjust and why this is.

Cohesion with partners

- An emerging theme across the interviews is the barriers to working with partner organisations including schools in light of Covid. This impacts on cohesion between researchers and partners. Many organisations like Investing with Children have struggled financially, which has longer term impact in terms of their relationships and work with young people.
- Janice also pointed to the difficulties of researchers working with schools at the minute due to the pressures they are under doing ‘repair work’. She said that “access to schools was difficult beforehand, and I think it's going to continue to be challenging.”

Sources of Information:


Loss of arts capacity - In Harmony

- **Background** - The In Harmony Newcastle Gateshead project is run by Sage Gateshead, which is an international music centre and venue in Gateshead, located on the River Tyne. It is one of six In Harmony projects, funded by Arts Council England, the DfE and private sponsors. It is a community orchestral project, based on the principles of Sistema England, that provides musical instruments and instruction to children living in socio-economically disadvantaged families. Over 50% of children participating in the In Harmony are classed as living in poverty.

- An evaluation of the impact of the In Harmony at Hawthorn Primary School, in the West End of Newcastle, notes that the programme has affected a positive change for most children’s confidence and self-esteem, has positively impacted on family relationships, and expanded some families’ interests to include classical music (Laing & Wysocki, 2019).

**Impact of Covid**

- Some Sage Gateshead staff were furloughed and schools were shut, so the project had to pause.
- Karen was told that some Sage staff were being made redundant as a direct result of Covid, and thinks this is representative of the loss of capacity in the arts and humanities that will take time to build back up again.

Ongoing Challenges to arts participation for children

- School curriculum is under increased pressure so arts provision may be squeezed and some schools are prioritising English and Maths.
- Afterschool clubs haven’t re-started and this reduces children’s opportunities to engage in arts-based creative activities that cannot fit into the school day. Afterschool clubs are particularly important for disadvantaged children who are less likely to participate in out of school activities than more affluent children (e.g., 29% of more affluent children are more likely to have afterschool music lessons, compared to 7% of more disadvantaged children. (Callanan et al., 2019)). Children living in poverty are more likely to attend after school clubs based on school premises than paid-for external provision, so this is a particularly important provision for them.
- This has a knock-on effect as children are still missing out on opportunities for positive experiences through after school clubs that are recognised to impact on children’s self-esteem, educational attainment, confidence, happiness and enjoyment, physical health, and relaxation (Callanan et al. 2019).

**Barriers to community cohesion based on experiences in community during main lockdown:**
• Without face-to-face contact it is harder to develop and/or maintain relationships with families.
• Some families are less keen on video calling. It may be because it is intrusive into their private lives or because of unfamiliarity with technology.
• Schools have reported using conversations at the garden gate to understand what families need.

Digital Inequalities (regional and financial impacting on arts provision)

• Digital poverty is a huge problem for disadvantaged communities. Experiences of a trust of primary schools in the West End of Newcastle show how variable access to tech has been through government schemes (data gathered Nov, 2020 by Professor Liz Todd, Newcastle Uni):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>How many electronic devices did the Local Authority initially allocate?</th>
<th>Has this allocation figure been reduced?</th>
<th>Have they actually received them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Yes to 17 (no explanation)</td>
<td>Triggering receipt due to classes being sent home this week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>2 (provided by social workers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Yes to 9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Triggering receipt due to classes being sent home this week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>Unspecified number received by some families from social worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>1 provided by social worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• According to research undertaken by the National Foundation for Education Research, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, limited pupil access to IT at home is a significant challenge, particularly for schools with the highest levels of deprivation (Nuffield, 2020).
• Access to green spaces. This has been variable during lockdown and the infrastructure had been run down already due to austerity.

• Schools are still experiencing closure and partial closures due to isolating and bubbles bursting because of Covid-19, so the impact continues. For example, as of 3 November 2020, 23 schools in Sunderland were either fully or partially closed due to Covid (chroniclelive.co.uk).

• Due to high Covid rates in the North, the impact is regionally varied and ongoing.

• Parents who are more affluent can continue to purchase online arts enrichment such as music lessons.

Sources of Information


Prof. Karen Sands O’Connor (British Academy Global Professor)

Karen’s main area of interest is black British children’s literature. She also works with Seven Stories and is helping them to expand their archive to include work by black writers and illustrators.

**Challenges before Covid:**

- In terms of acquiring archive material with Seven Stories, funding is an issue. Which writers and illustrators are ‘worth’ acquiring and preserving for future generations?
- Keeping authors and illustrators of colour on the agenda is a constant challenge. Media attention has dwindled on this subject in recent years. Karen and Jake Hope have been working with the Chartered Institute of Library Information Professionals on diversity by developing a programme with Seven Stories where young people will be taught how to review books which will have a bearing on future book awards (e.g., Carnegie). This will be an extra-curricular activity aimed at young people in Byker. This gives young people a voice and helps to ensure diversity in the shortlisting process as judges will have access to these reports. This project has the potential to be expanded to the national level.
- Payment: black writers and junior staff are more likely to be asked to do talks or events for free.

**Current Challenges/Opportunities**

- Being unable to meet in person. Zoom or online platforms provide the opportunity to take part in things which would have been geographically impossible, but with current work pressures and the amount of screen time it can be difficult to take full advantage of these opportunities.
- Access to digital resources in communities of colour.
- The reviewing project is designed to empower young people and keep them reading, particularly those from BAME backgrounds, because of the exacerbated inequalities.
- Changing the format of outputs. For example, doing a podcast instead of an exhibition.

**Longer-term Challenges**

- Maintaining contact and awareness of these programmes within the community.
- Maintaining professional contacts and discussing these issues when travel and in-person events are difficult or not possible.
- How will children catch up their lost education?
- The impact on limitations from the government on what can be taught in schools will affect how academics communicate with schools and teachers e.g., critical race theory.
Governance

- What is the effect of libraries being closed? The physical connection to books is often needed for readers.
- Seven Stories has seen an impact through closure and furlough, which will have a further impact on funding and future work because nothing has been done. To the government, local organisations like Seven Stories may seem unimportant, but it holds material of national significance and has an important impact on the local community. It does not have the same protections that organisations like the National Archives or the British Library have even though it holds material of national importance.

Inequalities

- Digital inequalities have been exacerbated and affect access to education. Laptop programmes are important to level the playing field.
- Covid has highlighted the ways in which government funding impacts different groups of people, and it is often communities of colour who see higher levels of sickness and whose socio-economic position is weaker.
Dr Kathryn Hollingsworth (Professor of Law, Newcastle Law School, Newcastle University)

Kathryn’s research interest is in children’s rights, particularly regarding children within the criminal justice system, focusing particularly on theorising children’s rights in this context and understanding how judges conceptualise children’s rights. She also co-led (with Professor Helen Stalford of Liverpool University) the Children’s Rights Judgments Project, the main output of which is a large edited collection (Rewriting Children’s Rights Judgments: From Academic Vision to New Practice (Hart Publishing, 2017). This book includes 30 existing legal judgments (in family law, criminal law, medical law and so on) rewritten from a children’s rights perspective, helping to demonstrate how children’s rights can be realized by judges in practice. The project also examined the issue of why and how judges should write their judgments specifically for children (Stalford and Hollingsworth, “This case is about you and your future”: Towards Judgments for Children’ 83(5) Modern Law Review 1030-1058), in ways that better secure children’s access to justice and experience of the justice process; develop children’s self-worth and identity; and improve substantive outcomes for children. Kathryn has also developed and delivered judicial training for UK and New Zealand criminal court judges on why and how sentences should be communicated to children (informed by interviews with justice-experienced children) and she has also been asked to help amend judicial guidance on the delivery of sentences to children.

Challenges/opportunities prior to Covid:

- Multiple challenges existed across the youth justice system prior to Covid-19 – including an over-representation of looked-after children, of children from black and minority ethnic groups, of children with neuro-diversities and/or communication and language needs. Children’s rights are not well protected in a system designed for adults (including fair hearing rights, rights in custodial institutions and their right to reintegration).
- Austerity measures (from 2008/09 onwards) had a particularly significant impact on the criminal justice system. There were some positives – for example, austerity was a contributory reason for the reduction of the number of children coming into the criminal justice system and being imprisoned. But at the same time, budget cuts resulted in the treatment and experience of children in the system worsening (particularly in custody) and the conditions associated with offending (poverty, school exclusions, mental health) worsened due to cuts across children’s and youth services. Disproportionality has increased hugely during this time (showing how austerity compounded the multiple disadvantages already facing some groups of children).
- With specific relation to Covid-19, there is a need to understand the lessons that can be learned from austerity (ie how the last economic crash impacted on children and children in the criminal justice system in particular). How can we avoid the economic impact of more austerity as we deal with the impact of Covid?
• Research-wise, (unfortunately) the dire situation in youth justice meant there was a lot of work to be done in relation to better protecting children’s rights.
• As a researcher, there were opportunities during this period arising from close working with NGOs and also opportunities to work with judges, more recently to discuss the ways in which they deliver sentences to children. Some judges were very willing to think about this issue.
• But there are also challenges in terms of judicial engagement: for example, some judges might be resistant to the language of children’s rights. They may also think that showing empathy for children who offend (e.g. in their sentencing remarks) may conflict with judicial values of independence and neutrality or they may fear unfavourable media attention for wording a sentencing too sympathetically to the child or concern that decisions that adopt a children’s rights approach to communicating sentence may be successfully appealed. These issues need to be considered and addressed to ensure academic research is able to affect change in practice.

Challenges/opportunities since Covid:

Challenges:
• Relationships with people working in the criminal justice system. Kathryn has built up relationships with professionals in the criminal justice system but Covid has meant that face-to-face interactions are no longer possible. Interactions online are still possible, but the chance meetings, the informal chats etc. are no longer easily possible, and new people are coming in who she will not have the chance to make those connections with.
• Time. People’s time has been much more pressured since Covid. People she would normally work with are having to adapt too.

Opportunities:
• Online communities e.g., for seminars. It is now possible to attend events that would have been impossible to get to physically.
• There are also opportunities to conduct interviews with wider range of participants, and to attend virtual meetings that would not otherwise be possible. For other researchers, opportunities to ‘attend’ virtual court hearings may make them more accessible for research/learning possibilities.

Inequalities

Short-term challenges:
• Covid has reinforced existing challenges and inequalities.
• Disproportionality. Too many children in the UK are still being incarcerated compared to other countries.
• Delays in the criminal justice system. There is a backlog of cases which means delays to hearings which could impact whether a defendant is tried as a child or an adult for a crime committed when they were a child. This could
also impact where they get sent for trial and incarceration (e.g., young offenders). It also increases the uncertainty and thus stress and anxiety for children.

- If the child is an EU citizen, it could impact ability to apply for settled status.
- Mental health. Children have been locked up for 22 hours a day and their access to education has diminished.
- Ability to rehabilitate children has been severely impacted.
- Withdrawal of services for children e.g., closing youth centres.
- There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that drugs gangs are changing their ways of working. They are now using local children, so they do not disappear or travel to places on their own where they are obviously out of place which would usually alert the police. These are different patterns of exploitation. It is harder to find the children who are being exploited. Youth centres and other places with adults who would engage with them normally are not there, meaning there are less adults to raise awareness of potential issues.

**Longer-term challenges:**

- Cuts to funding mean that youth services will not be as well funded. Funding is likely to be directed to younger children rather than teenagers. This places teenagers at risk of exploitation and criminal offences.
- Job losses, e.g., jobs that young people could do are not available because of closures.
- Potential closures or cuts to legal aid

**Inequalities**

- Job losses
- Competition for funding
- North-South divide
- Cuts to legal aid
- Lack of access to education
- BAME communities are more susceptible to the effects of Covid - children from particular ethnic backgrounds may have suffered more bereavement due to Covid.

**Role of humanities/social sciences?**

- Cultural engagement creates a sense of belonging and gives children the ability to communicate what they are feeling or have been through.
- It is important not to silence young people (especially 16–17-year-olds, whose voices have not been given much media coverage).

**Sources of Information**

Children’s Rights Judgements Project:
https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH/M009033/1/#tabOverview
Dr Larry Zazzo (Lecturer in Music, School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University)

Larry is Lecturer in Music at Newcastle University as well as a professional operatic countertenor. He is currently the principal investigator with colleague Dr. Adam Behr on a British Academy-funded grant titled ‘Voiceless? Classical Singers and Covid-19’.

Well-being

The impact on amateur choirs of an almost complete cessation of live choral activity will be significant, as the positive mental health benefits of singing in a choir are well documented. This is not the area, however, of Larry’s Covid-focused project for the British Academy (Voiceless? Classical Singers and Covid-19), which concentrates on the impact on professional freelance singers. In terms of his preliminary findings on the BA project (planned for publication in spring 2021 by the Journal of Musical Health and Wellbeing) the impact was variable - financial worries were impacting singers negatively and creative results are mixed to negative; but spending time with their families was a boon.

- ‘The background studies that I read are very clear that amateur singing, I think particularly for people in choirs, the withdrawal of this activity in the humanities will have a significant impact on well-being, especially among the older population.’
- ‘On an amateur level, singing has been shown to be very therapeutic. It’s kind of almost uncontestable in the literature’.
- ‘Audiences are very very hungry for a return to live performances’.

Challenges:

These are well-documented e.g., the impact of cancelling concerts.

Opportunities for increased participation during Covid through new practices.

- Working around the inability for students to do live performances has led to innovative use of technology. Larry describes this as ‘possibly measurable and long-lasting change.’
- Instituted online weekly student public performance – one chance for students to get together.
‘The students are always terribly nervous about performing . . . it’s their chance to experience that.’
Students’ recorded video performances are steamed online to the public and fellow students; responses to the performance are shared through the chat function. This has had a positive effect: students are far more willing to ask questions this way, it reduces anxiety over public performance, students have responded positively to the increased peer engagement, Q & A, and feedback.
‘Now this is something we never did before when the performances were live, and I can say the response has been fantastic. The students have been overall mainly positive.’
‘The stress of performance is actually a negative for well-being and you have to balance that against the possible payback of the audience going crazy.’

‘Now our students can give in-time feedback to our performers and I’m positive this is a much better way of engaging listeners as well as performers and I am committed to maintaining this.’
This way of working will continue post-Covid restrictions alongside public performance.

‘Without Covid, without us being forced to do this, we might never have discovered that this is actually a better way to engage with the majority of the students during these performances.’

Positive impact on well-being due to new practices due to Covid.
‘I think they are all so delighted to come together.’
While some students still have performance anxiety, ‘for other students we have almost zero performance anxiety because they are performing with videos. So for anyone who is the least bit anxious, Covid had been an absolute dream for them because they are not performing live. But I also feel that because they are not performing live they are not benefitting from one of the principal aims of the performance module as it was pre-Covid’.

Opportunity and need to develop measures across Faculty to assess impact on students in terms of limited opportunity to perform.
Interested in developing a mechanism to measure the impact and wellbeing on students, particularly performers versus other students, ‘I think this will become a developing problem’.
‘I think this is particularly relevant in terms of the humanities, in terms of that creative outlet that they are not able to have.’
My recent experience with student submissions of interim recital videos over the past month (Feb 2021) has only reinforced my thoughts above: while some students were able to really stretch themselves creatively in this medium, many others—especially those students working in ensembles—had to compromise their creative plans for their recitals not once but several times due to the changing rules of social-distancing and access to practice facilities which, for several, curtailed their ability to make music together. It’s also become clear from further focus groups in our BA study that an important part of what is called ‘solo’ classical singing is actually working with others collaboratively—either with a pianist or an orchestra or other singers on a stage. It’s this social element of the activity of preparing for performances that is missed as much as the final output of the performance itself by the singers involved, even if this is compensated for by increased time at home with families. In this sense, the positive wellbeing aspect of solo classical singing derived from forming relationships through a common activity comes closer to that experienced by members of amateur choirs.

Sources of information:


Professor Liz Todd (Professor of Educational Inclusion- Newcastle University – School of Education Communication and Language Sciences)

Community, cohesion – Partnership - Inequalities

Liz is involved in the following projects and all have been impacted by Covid and are responding to the social and community needs being felt as a result of Covid:

**Evaluating the Cost of School Day intervention for and with Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).** This is a three-year lottery funded project by CPAG that involves an intervention in schools in Scotland, Wales, and England to address stigmatizing in schools as a result of poverty. The intervention hears what children (and also staff and parents) say about how poverty impacts on schooling, produces a report on the actions a school could take to remove cost barriers and stigmatization, and provides a process for the schools to take ownership of action. Liz is PI of the evaluation of this project with co-Is Karen Laing, Ulrike Thomas and Lucy Tiplady. This project is run through the Centre for Research in Learning and Teaching in the School of Education, Communication and Language Science.

All of the projects Liz is running have been impacted by Covid-19, as has the work of the partner organisations, Children North East (Newcastle) and the Child Action Poverty Group (London), in that access to schools is no longer possible. However, the nature of Liz's methodology, which is responsive to change, has meant that these projects have been able to adapt because flexibility was embedded into the project from the start. This has strengthened relationships with partners.

Children North East have developed a process of Poverty Proofing the school day, the aim of which is ‘to remove barriers to learning which exist because of the impacts of living in poverty’. Poverty proofing involves, among other things, a whole school consultation and listening to the lived experiences of children living in poverty to make changes that will stop those from poorer backgrounds being stigmatized at school. Measures that could be taken include, for example, making school uniforms more affordable or ensuring that the administration of Free School Meals is fair and allows students the same freedom to choose when and what to eat as their peers. Prior to the pandemic, this took place in school over the course of a week, which is no longer possible. Children North East and the Child Action Poverty Group had to find ways to continue this work as it still needs doing. Children North East have developed an online/remote version of this process, as have the Child Action Poverty Group. Liz, as well as research associates and senior research associates from the School, are now evaluating how they have had to change the process because of Covid-19 across different regions. This work is ongoing.

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‘Children’s well-being is compromised if they’re stigmatised. We know that education is linked to physical health. But if you’re talking about mental health, then it’s very compromised’. (Liz)

Liz also directs a UKRI ESRC Covid response funded project to hear the voices of 1000 children and young people in the northeast and get organisations that work with children to take appropriate action. She works on this project with Co-Is Lydia Wysocki and Lucy Tiplady and with Luke Bramhall and colleagues at the charity Children North East. This is a completely co-produced project between Children North East and Newcastle University. Liz is also part of the West End Children’s Community and has been working on this throughout the pandemic. This is a long-term strategic university community partnership. It is an alliance of organisations in the West End that aim to engage the communities around co-produced aims and projects.

Cohesion and community - partnerships

Liz and the group of researchers she works with have been able to adapt projects rapidly because they have close partnerships with schools and community organisations. This closeness is the result of a methodology rooted in co-production and understanding of partners’ needs. As such, the research team were already adept at responding to the needs of their partners.

‘The only way we we’re able to do our research is to work incredibly closely in partnership with people . . . What Covid-19 has done is actually strengthen our relationships . . . but we’ve had to be incredibly flexible’. (Liz)

Community, Cohesion during lockdown

The West End Children’s Community is formed of schools, the local authority and other charities and cultural organisations who have made an agreement to form a kind of governance structure, working collaboratively with communities in a very local area for the needs of children and families. This was able to keep going during the main lockdown. The children’s community received money for face-to-face play activities, the only ones provided in that area. For example, the Elswick Lamp-Post Play Project, supported by the West End Schools Trust, West End Children’s Community and Sussed and Able, took place over six weeks in the Elswick area of Newcastle.18 PLAY in NEWCASTLE staff delivered a series of outdoor play sessions in areas identified by schools. In all, 44 children took part in a range of activities including pebble drawing, clay modelling, dance offs, and making music. Children North East were also able to run a play initiative, Playful Lives, in collaboration with the West End School’s Trust, the West End Children’s Community, and Sussed and

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Able, due to support funded Best Summer Ever programme.\textsuperscript{19}

**Withdrawal of arts enrichment**

Liz spoke about a programme on children’s wellbeing that she has evaluated with Dr Karen Laing, a colleague in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, for the West End Children’s Community and West End Schools Trust. They evaluated this project, which took place prior to the pandemic, in June. The project could not take place at present, due to the ongoing need for social distancing: it involved artists, an occupational therapist and a teacher working in school. She observed that it is very difficult for schools to build arts events into their day. Stress is a significant factor in schools being unable to cope with any additional requests.

Dr Lucy Pearson (Senior Lecturer in Children’s Literature, School of English Lit, Language and Linguistics, Newcastle University)

Dr Pearson is a Senior Lecturer in Children’s Literature, Newcastle University. In particular, she works on texts produced for children and their historical dimensions. She works closely with Seven Stories and recently worked on a project with Dr Hazel Sheeky Bird which allowed children to use and interact with archival material.

Challenges and Opportunities pre-COVID-19

- There is tension between joining up impact dimensions with research dimensions.
- The levels of resourcing and the time commitments to carry out projects/initiatives, especially working with a small, non-profit organization (for whom even small amounts of resourcing may be prohibitive). The output needs to justify the resources.
- Pressures on the curriculum when working with school partners: there is limited time available for work which is not directly curriculum / assessment focused.

Challenges and Opportunities Post-COVID -19

- Staff at Seven Stories were furloughed, making the resourcing harder. There was potential to move some elements online but with furloughed staff there was no time or resourcing to do so.

Short-term challenges of COVID-19

- In-person activities cannot take place under the current circumstances. The archives project involves using the archives in physical spaces. Some digital interactions might be possible using the same methodologies but these would be subject to resourcing (and would still lose an important dimension in terms of the embodiment of the archive)
- Funding and resources. Seven Stories closed for 6 months, and the new exhibition has not been able to launch (therefore no income from it).

Longer-term challenges:

- Negotiating in-person events.
- Resourcing for events.
- Moving more materials/events to the digital - there may be more hesitation about doing in-person events.
- Funding. We are heading into a recession and visitor income is likely to drop. There is lingering uncertainty about returning to those kinds of spaces.
- Long-term effects of education. There is anxiety about children falling behind. There is a drift towards prioritising core skills and taking up more time on things that can be assessed, which means there will be even less time available to release students for additional activities. This could become an opportunity if policy shifts direction – with the potential impact on well-being,
extra-curricular activities could actually help address the gaps and fill them rather than the more traditional methods.

**Issues of time, scale, place**

- In-person activities.
- The opportunity for the digital is real e.g., British Library’s *Discovering Children’s Books* project – an online resource with creative activities ([https://www.bl.uk/childrens-books](https://www.bl.uk/childrens-books)). There has been take-up of this, but the digital still requires resourcing.

**Governance**

- There is an exacerbated sense that cultural organisations are “at the mercy of national policy.”

**Inequalities**

- The northeast is an historically deprived region and this is likely to get worse in the recession post COVID-19. This has an effect on cultural organisations (even down to the effect on public transport and thus people’s ability to travel to cultural sites).

**Role of humanities/social sciences**

- They play crucial roles e.g. for well-being, and finding meaning. We have lived through a time when the value of the arts has been highlighted - people have found connection through various kinds of arts.
- A prevailing aspect of the crisis has been the insufficiency of public narratives about what we need to do and how we need to live.
- “It's been extremely difficult for people to parse out the truth or to feel that there's a consistent message that speaks to them and their interests and that has really divided responses to the pandemic. And those are exactly the kinds of things that the humanities are well-placed to address: actually you know as humanities scholars, we already do a lot of thinking about how people receive and respond to narratives and how they can be more inclusive. And how they can be used to convey complex information. And so going forward, you know, in an ideal world, I'd like to see the arts and humanities playing a much bigger role that gave that expertise to public policy and also gave that kind of creativity to communities, who might start to shape their own narratives as well about what's effectively a mass collective trauma. I think it's quite important that people have the tools to be able to articulate what that trauma has been for them. And that's another area in which the kinds of initiatives that we are placed to offer could be really helpful.”
Matthew is Dean of Research and Innovation in HaSS and has a research background in children’s literature. In spring 2020 he led an application to the UKRI Covid-19 fund (‘Towards a National Collection’ route) for a project aiming to mobilise an inter-institutional national collection of children’s books to make a positive difference in children’s lives during and following the pandemic. The project was based on the premise that coronavirus has severely impacted young people’s educational engagement, and mental and emotional health, and that children’s books are uniquely appropriate to address these problems. Reading is vital in supporting education when schooling is disrupted. Moreover, well-chosen stories and pictures, with carefully-designed supporting material, have the potential to be highly effective in engaging children with issues affecting their wellbeing, such as isolation, anxiety and loss. The collaborating partners on the project were the British Library, Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children’s Books, and Coram, the largest provider of social health education in English schools. They are among many institutions to use children’s books already in these ways. The project aimed to audit and evaluate current practice, and to convene a diverse range of expertise and stakeholders to iteratively design and trial six digitally-delivered ‘modules’ in a range of contexts. Rigorous evaluation would feed into a review of good practice. The project was intended to develop a set of principles that could underlie future interventions as society emerges from the coronavirus crisis, benefiting generations of children, as well as ensuring new reach and impact for our national collections. The project was not funded, but the coalition of researchers and partners remains active.

Needing to adapt current research projects - ‘pivoting’

‘I think [...] that the pandemic is obviously dreadful in many ways, but it is encouraging researchers like me and project partners to think differently about how we might use our research to make positive impacts in society. And this application [Mobilising national collections] was a classic example of that. So this project built on connections, the project, the application I put in, built on connections that we already had with the British Library, with Seven Stories, and indeed, a developing project partnership with Coram. And what we all had to do back in March, all of those organisations . . . we all have to suddenly pivot, of course, and try and think how we could do what we were already doing in an online world. And then, you know, this, this project came out of thinking, working with those partners, and the experience of what was happening during the first lockdown when children’s education suddenly was so disrupted by the pandemic, and schools were closed and home-school became the norm; people were desperate because of this home education for the kind of resources, which could benefit children. So we pivoted very rapidly. And why I was interested in working with a British Library and Seven Stories and Coram particularly is that they had excellent outstanding experience and expertise in this area. And they had done really good work to actually make what they had available in new ways to a slightly different public. And what was really exciting was that the, you know, the switch to the digital could actually, probably help those organisations to reach constituencies of children and young people in ways that they wouldn’t have been able to do through their normal programmes.’
‘So that's where I thought our research could really be helpful, because we could develop with other partners and with schools, we could advise the British Library on the best ways to deploy that digital resource. Now, they actually had some quite good ways of doing that themselves. They developed that very quickly, and we can learn from them, but there is a real opportunity for us to analyse and to test what they have done. To evaluate other ways of doing that as well. And to try out other ways of doing that and to evaluate then what would be good practice. So that's working with British Library, we'd do the same with Seven Stories who are in exactly the same situation. Of course, they too had to change up from face-to-face things to online things. And they do that really well. And we can learn from that. Evaluate and test it. Compare what different organisations are doing. And they recommend good practice for the future.’

**On the opportunities working with university researchers could bring to partner organisations.**

‘I think they could still benefit from the kind of research we in the university might do as well, as we work out what is best practice. Same with Coram. So that's the kind of core of this bid, and it encapsulates what I think you're looking for, or what we might be looking for here, Hazel, which is thinking about how, you know, we have to turn out research around to think about the opportunities that this presents to reach larger audiences, affect them, impact them in different ways, perhaps in some ways more deeply, and more sustainably. And so there's a real opportunity for advantage there.’

**On Mobilising national collections proposal**

‘in this particular project. It was thinking about deploying national collections for children and young people's benefit during the lockdown. So we were thinking of the ways in which children's well-being has been affected. Their mental health has been affected during a pandemic for all sorts of reasons, connected with COVID. And we thought that one really interesting way of making positive interventions there was to deploy the collections at the British Library, the collections of Seven Stories, and make those collections kind of work in a positive way to support well-being and mental health in the lives of children. And, you know, we don’t know the best ways of doing that yet. That’s what we’re feeling around. And that’s how it will benefit our partners.’

**Implications for methodology, evidence and co-curation**

‘One thing you'll notice about the bid, we put in the mobilising national collections thing, you'll notice that there was an expert in children’s literature. But there are also two other RAs built in specifically because they had expertise in analysis and evaluation. So there are established methods of evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative. They are built in that and I think it is possible to get evidence. But what I’d ask you, what I’d suggest that we think about is that there are two sort of levels of impact that we would be aiming for in a project like this. And in projects of this kind more generally. One is on the children and young people themselves, on the end users. But what we're also really hoping for here was impact on the cultural institutions, like the British Academy, the British Library, or Seven Stories, and that's
where the sustainability comes in. Because what we're able to do if those projects are successful, what we're able to do is help develop their resources so that they're spending their money, they're deploying their own resources in ways which are maximally effective. And that's not just for this year, not just for next year, but it's in perpetuity; it's also an opportunity, but for some long time, it's also advancing, you know, our thinking in research terms about methodologies for engaging publics and working two ways with publics – both directly and through change in the agencies that provide resources to the public.

‘I think one thing that universities are really well placed to do is to act as conveners, or nodes in a larger matrix of different players from different disciplines. So, universities have lots of disciplines, obviously academic disciplines, which they bring together and researchers who are specialists in each of them. But we're also very good at convening partners. And we have relationships with end users of research. So it can be our role to bring these agencies, and approaches and kinds of expertise together, so they can talk to one another, learn from one another, and continue to produce better resources as a result.’
Michael is a lecturer in human geography at Newcastle University. He has been funded through the BBC Children In Need programme to evaluate the Teen Dads project, in collaboration with North East Young Dads and Lads (2020-2022).

**North East Young Dads and Lads** (NEYDL) is a youth support service that helps young men and young fathers to play an active and meaningful role in the lives of their children, within families and wider society.

**Impact of COVID-19 on the charity:**

- Lost its drop-in centre in Dunston - lost familiar base for young dads.
- Re-focused on digital offer - increases capacity but this is reliant on technology.
- Reallocation of support from transport to tech/data.

**Seven Stories reading programme**

Pre-COVID-19 Michael worked with a Seven Stories Creative Associate to run a family reading programme for 10 young dads from the Dunston area of Gateshead. Many were non-resident dads and had experienced difficulties/disruptions in their education. The programme led to a bespoke after-hours event for the young dads, their children and partners, at the Seven Stories visitor centre; the young dads were given an annual Seven Stories pass at the end of the programme.

**Impact of COVID-19 - limitation of amenity - loss of creative ownership and opportunities**

- Young dads are not able to use the annual passes as the visitor centre has been closed since the start of the first lockdown.
- Pre-COVID-19 the young dads worked with Gillian Rennie (Seven Stories’ Senior Curator) co-curating exhibition content for ‘Where Stories Come From Gallery’. This gallery has not opened, and the young dads have lost the opportunity to realise their ownership of this creative engagement with Seven Stories archive.
- The Baltic also wanted to work with NEYDL co-curating an exhibition on urban space and play. This has been postponed with no date determined for when this will take place in future.

**Barriers to participation (Thresholds)**

- Geographical - the young dads were uneasy in an area of the city they were not familiar with and felt they did not belong in (i.e., the Ouseburn).
- Venues - Cultural venues need to ask themselves how accessible their welcome is to people unfamiliar with the area as well as the venue.

**Opportunities – digital**
• Already looking at ways to use digital technology to bridge thresholds, e.g., follow-up funding from Seven Stories reading programme was used to develop a digital storytelling app across quayside (Baltic gallery to Seven Stories visitor centre).
• Many of the young dads predisposed to digital storytelling pre-COVID-19 could build on lessons learned on best ways of harnessing digital storytelling/literacy learnt through the pandemic.
• Digital technology has the potential to develop ways of bridging entry points to cultural venues.

**Barriers – Cohesion/Ownership**

• Funding is needed to further test digital bridging and overcoming threshold issues for the more marginalised using arts venues - this needs to be about the wider space, not just the venue.

**Community – partnerships and understanding**

• Venues need to work with community groups to make sure they are developing the right offers and using the right means of reaching out to more marginalised groups. E.g., if they are promoting virtual story-times, the people doing them need to resonate with different audiences.
• Venues need to work with community groups to really understand who needs support, what their needs are, and the best ways to appeal to them.
• Consultation needs to take place to understand how to reach different groups, e.g., the young dads tend not to use Facebook/Twitter - Seven Stories’ main social media platform – but gaming culture is very important.

**Belonging/Community**

• While the digital offer has been well-received, there is still a desire for face-to-face support.
• Social distancing has made it very difficult to maintain social supportive networks, e.g., restrictions on meeting indoors, the need to use public transport to get to green spaces etc.
Michele Deans (Operations Director for Children North East)

Michele is Operations Director for Children North East, which delivers support to babies, children, young people, and their families. She has a background in the voluntary sector including community development work. Michele has established and run multiple projects.

Children North East delivers a range of services including: poverty proofing, counselling, peer mentoring, crisis intervention, therapeutic services and programmes aimed at babies, children, young people and families in the North East.

Challenges and Opportunities Pre-COVID

- Squeeze of funding prior to COVID made charities very competitive with one another. Collaboration was not always on the table - “Nothing happened quickly”.
- Working from home was not possible – for example, there were no laptops at Children North East as every member of staff had a working station in one of our centres
- Developing new projects could take a long time, especially if working collaboratively
- There was an overall strategic plan, which the pandemic has changed.
- Partnerships were not as robust as they should have been.

Current Challenges and Opportunities

- Everyone pulled together quickly when COVID started. Organisations came together to see what they could deliver, and Children North East (CNE) moved quickly to delivering services on an online platform.
- Lockdown 1 had no end date. CNE had to get people working from home quickly in order to keep services running.
- Counselling/therapy was continued and done online/over the phone, which some people continue to prefer.
- Fundraising is an ongoing challenge because of cancellation of events etc.
- Furlough was used to save jobs; this was not a pleasant experience for all the staff who were furloughed. CNE saw the furlough scheme as a government grant, and whilst 25% of staff were furloughed, everyone was brought back by September 2020 and jobs have not been lost.
- CNE put out a campaign asking for school-based resources e.g., paper, pens. To date 5000 resource packs have been delivered through donations across the North East
- CNE set up a helpline for domestic abuse (reports show that cases of domestic violence and abuse increased during lockdown).20

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• CNE received £50k from the National Lottery. This was used to deliver parent-infant therapy online.  
  
• Partnerships and collaborations happened quickly, and there was lots of positive support for one another.

Short-term Challenges

• There are major financial challenges. It is important to work with those who give the charity sector money e.g. local government. What will be available and how will it be distributed? Commissioners are very formulaic and it can be difficult through the tender process to draw down long term funding; funders are often easier. Assurances are needed from commissioners and funders that there will be funding available.

• There are concerns about the lives of babies, children, young people, families, and how they have been affected by COVID. What will “after” look like?
  o What toll will this take on people?
  o Mental health (children, young people, adults).
  o Consequences of poverty, redundancy.
  o Health inequalities.
  o Impact of bereavements.
  o Threat of death/COVID – takes a toll on people. Anxiety.

Longer-term Challenges

• Advancements in technology are likely to be huge, which might involve some risks.

• There is likely to be an after-shock for people that CNE support. People will continue living their lives, but in a different context.

• People might try to change their lives. For example, people have left their jobs because they have realised that they are not where they wanted to be. This could be a good opportunity for creativity.

Challenges related to issues of place/scale/time

• Predictability has gone. We now have to work in new places and engage with new people. The challenge for CNE is being able to continue doing its work through what might be a ‘financial black hole’.

• Strategy – CNE is currently writing strategy for next 5 years.

Governance


• There is more engagement in partnership working but this might not last. It feels new, but will need to see if it defaults back to how people used to do things.

**Cohesion**

• CNE is much closer to communities. They want to participate more and engage more.
• Young people especially are desperate to get doing something.
• There is greater engagement online for training.
• People’s need to be connected with others/the community etc shows.

**Inequalities**

• Things are going to get much worse. The North East already experiences huge levels of inequality. Anything CNE does will only be a small part of what needs to happen.
• Health and wellbeing will be affected. Families may be affected who have never been affected by inequality before. How will they know who to ask for help?
• Domestic abuse has increased and there is extra strain on relationships.
• Educational attainment is of great concern with the cancellation of exams. Young people may realise that their hard work and preparation for exams meant nothing.
  o This will have an impact on universities and young people.
  o This will impact on disabled young people, e.g. they might have been shielding and so have not been able to participate in their usual activities. What is the impact of that?
• There are inequalities between urban and rural areas, e.g. loss of tourism.
• The North East faces a big challenge and will probably need to lobby government for money.
• Leaving the EU – the UK will be in a weaker financial position for a while.
  o There is potential for job losses and organisations closing or moving abroad because of Brexit and the pandemic.

**Role of Humanities/Social Sciences?**

• Yes – they can play a role moving forward. For example, the Arts Council donated a small grant for CNE to buy resources for children
• Poverty proofing e.g. working with BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art (Gateshead) [https://children-ne.org.uk/share-your-views-as-we-work-with-baltic-to-poverty-proof-their-organisation/](https://children-ne.org.uk/share-your-views-as-we-work-with-baltic-to-poverty-proof-their-organisation/)

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Prof. Paul Seedhouse (Professor of Educational and Applied Linguistics, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University)

Professor Seedhouse has a background as a language teacher and in applied linguistics. His work now focuses on spoken interactions, as well as interactions in digital environments. He has developed an app called Linguacuisine, which developed from a digital kitchen and aims to help language learning through cooking.

The project had 8 digital kitchens across Europe, but this was expensive and did not reach many people. A free app has been developed and is now used in 83 countries around the world.

- The app allows users to upload recipes in different languages as well as to follow them and learn language skills. This allows for cross cultural interaction.
- The app has global and local reach. Work has been done with schools in Newcastle, and also with a refugee action group – Action Foundation (https://actionfoundation.org.uk/).
- He has worked with the Magic Hat Café which tackles food poverty. (https://www.themagichatcafe.co.uk/)

Pre-Covid challenges/opportunities:
- Challenges: getting people to use the app
  - Accessibility to kitchens (there is one in the George VI building but there is limited capacity).
  - Access to internet and digital devices.
- Opportunities: Schools are usually eager to partner and to visit the university. There was funding available to cover cost and pupils get to experience the university environment.

Challenges/opportunities during Covid-19:
- They were contacted directly by Newcastle City Council during the pandemic to produce recipes for Newcastle children during lockdown. The idea was to help tackle issues of food poverty and the lack of access to education at the same time. Ingredients had to be sourced from the council’s list to accommodate low-income families.
- Access to internet was a problem for some families: bilingual recipe cards were produced which was a low-tech practical solution. 9,000 of these were delivered in packages from the council which also included food vouchers and ideas for activities.
- It has not been possible to go into schools.

Short-term challenges:
- A new app (ENACT Europa) has come out in February and energies will now be spent on that. This app includes more cultural activities beyond cooking/recipe sharing.
- Funding for the previous app has run out, though PhD students will continue working on it.
Longer-term Challenges:
- Linguacuisine is changing to a nutrition project and students at Newcastle University are doing nutrition projects using the app.
- There is also a possibility that it may be used on the Malaysia campus.
- The app is complementary to language learning, so issues over pressures on delivering the curriculum aren’t as pertinent as it can be used in addition to, not as a replacement for, lessons.
- Funding. The project was partly sponsored by Erasmus and the UK is no longer participating in this programme.

Time, place, scale:
- There are no issues with scale as it is an app and has global reach.
- Time and staffing are issues. 2 PhD students will continue working on it, but other resources will go into the new app.

Governance:
- There have been issues with going into schools.

Inequalities:
- Yes, pre-existing differences have been exacerbated. Lower income families have fewer resources at home.
- This is not just about holiday hunger, but about access to education. This is what the council aimed to address by inviting Paul/Linguacuisine to work with them.

Do humanities/social sciences have a role to play?
- Yes. This app is a good example of how they can be used to address issues such as holiday hunger and lack of access to learning.
- This app has a “glocal” significance (glocal = global + local).

Shared data/ relevant sources
‘Action Foundation and Linguacuisine’ (partner case study)


Selected Publications based on Linguacuisine (for a more comprehensive list, see https://linguacuisine.com/publications/)


Prof. Peter Hopkins (Prof of Social Geography, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University)

Peter is Professor of Social Geography at Newcastle University, though his work is very interdisciplinary. He works with young people who are often from minority ethnic backgrounds and is currently working on two projects with refugees and asylum seekers: ‘The everyday experiences of young refugees and asylum-seekers in public spaces’ (funded by HERA) and ‘Responding to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the context of Covid-19’ (funded by the ESRC). Data collection for these projects moved online and was generally restricted to the use of individual interviews as the use of more participatory methods was restricted. Here he points to some of the specific issues experiences by young refugees’ lives in relation to the pandemic as well as broader points about the challenges facing younger people:

Challenges and Opportunities Pre-Covid

- There was inequality in transitions to adulthood with this presenting specific challenges from some of the more marginalized young people.
- There is an elongation of youth transition to adulthood with this being unequally experienced by different groups of young people.
- Other markers of social difference e.g., gender, sexuality, race, can also present challenges.

Current Challenges and Opportunities

- Many already existing inequalities have been exacerbated.
- People living on the edge fell into dire situations very quickly.
- Many asylum seekers and refugees were left without basic forms of support or have restricted access to online support.
- Challenges in relation to staff who are furloughed and when they might return to work.

Short-term Challenges:

- The closing of schools and other organizations has led to a loss of learning for children and young people. This is especially the case for young people with restricted access to online material and other resources.
- There is unequal access to learning at home depending on family circumstances and relationships.
- Digital inequalities, especially during the first lockdown, were stark and had significant impacts on young refugees in terms of learning and social isolation.

Longer-term Challenges:
• Inequalities could play out over a few years, especially in terms of education and the learning lost by cohorts of young people at crucial points in their educational journeys.
• It might take a while for the full effects on education and children/young people to be realized.
• Mental health challenges such as those associated with depression and anxiety as a result of increased isolation and limited social contact with other young people.
• Lack of physical activity due to lockdowns could lead to longer term health and well-being challenges.

Challenges/Opportunities related to place/scale/time

• Lots of inequalities are place-specific, e.g. ethnic minority communities and deprived neighborhoods tend to have been most negatively affected by the pandemic.
• The closures of arts and cultural values – and social distancing restrictions when such places are open - impact initiatives such as school trips and community engagement. There is also the problem of timescale – these kinds of events can be a once in a lifetime opportunity for young people.
• Local organisations who provide services to asylum seekers and refugees have gone above and beyond duty to provide assistance where they can and/or to move services online.
• Many refugee youth experience challenging housing contexts including a lack of Wi-Fi and access to technological resources, and parents who struggle to assist with home schooling as they do not speak English. There is often restricted space available too in such accommodation.

Governance

• The provision of hotel accommodation for some asylum seekers and refugees demonstrates that lodgings can be found for such people when needed (although the process for this has been heavily criticized as the accommodation was often overcrowded and unsafe with hostile staff).
• The deficiencies in asylum governance that existed before the pandemic have been exacerbated which has increased the vulnerability of refugees.

Cohesion

• Many refugees have been helping in their communities by contributing to mutual aid or other groups or in preparing personal protective equipment for frontline workers.
• Some asylum seekers have struggled as they arrived during the pandemic to find local services and facilities were closed. Others were resilient to the
changes and felt that negotiating lockdowns was part and parcel of the
struggles and insecurities that have been part of their lives for many years.

• Tensions between neighbours have grown; some people are
anxious/nervous. Hate crime has increased.

Role of Humanities and Social Sciences:

• Social science scholars are often skilled at thinking through policy implications
as they understand social and political issues and can consider the wider
implications and what might need to change. However, it can be difficult to
engage with policy makers and to present research findings to them in a form
and manner that they will find useful.

• Social science and humanities work is crucial as it can help to improve
children’s education, to enhance health and wellbeing, to rethink finances,
and to imagine what a different future might look like.

Useful Sources:

Middlemass, Rachel. (25 Aug 2020). What is the role of the social sciences in the
response to COVID-19? 4 priorities for shaping the post-pandemic world.
https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/08/25/what-is-the-role-of-the-
social-sciences-in-the-response-to-covid-19-4-priorities-for-shaping-the-post-
pandemic-world/

Campaign for Social Science. Home - Campaign for Social Science

Discover Society. Covid-19 UK: Responding to the needs of asylum seekers in
challenging and dangerous times | Discover Society

The Royal Geographic Society (various blogs).
Ruth Brock and Michael Tucker (Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation)

The Shakespeare Schools Foundation joined Coram in April 2020 after 20 years as an independent charity. Coram shares the mission and values of the Shakespeare Schools Foundation and improving children’s chances. The performing arts and Shakespeare are their vehicle for mission, and children and young people who take part gain a range of skills including literary and communication skills, as well as self-confidence.

The Coram Shakespeare School Festival

This is their flagship programme and is a multi-touch point programme which involves training teachers to become, in essence, theatre directors. They provide award-winning schemes of work which culminates in a nationwide festival where children perform on professional stages. The programme is evaluated in two main areas: life skills and self-confidence, and academic progress. They have developed a relationship with the Skills Builder Partnership to help measure this progress. The festival is non-competitive and non-discriminatory. Each year, between 700 and 1000 schools take part, and they all stage a final production at a partner theatre directed by one of the school’s teachers (trained by Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation). They see 96-97% of lead teachers reporting that their students grew in resilience and teamwork (96%) and confidence (97%). Through the three surveys given to teachers over the course, most teachers see a noticeable improvement in the children and in their skills. The Shakespeare Schools Foundation has been developing the academic side over the past few years. They provide a free scheme of work that can be used alongside the festival and includes reading and writing targets for Key Stage 2. They also have self-imposed targets around inclusion and aim to include a third of schools from the top 3 deciles of the Multiple Deprivation Index and 10% of children with a special educational need or disability.23 They are usually successful in reaching these targets. Participation is generally 45% primary school and 45% secondary school.

The Shakespeare Schools Foundation ran a project in 2019 titled ‘Shakespeare For All’ and its aim was to ‘evaluate how curriculum-linked resources that promote a creative and active approach to learning can impact attainment for children at primary schools in areas of high deprivation’ with a second focus on the impact of the project in Special Education Needs and Disabilities School.24 They measured academic attainment and social development. They saw outstanding results. Lower attaining children in particular saw a big improvement in both areas. Lower-attaining children also made the greatest gain in the area of Aspiration and Ambition as they became more engaged learners and pushed themselves further. This is particularly

important for children from areas of deprivation as it ‘has the power to break vicious cycles and help them realise the opportunities that are out there’.  

Challenges Pre-COVID:

- Sustainability. Their funding model is that schools pay 50% of the cost of the programme, which is less than £1000, and the charity matches the other half. A decade of austerity and cuts has seen a steady decline in the number of schools able to participate.
- Capacity, time, resources. Overstretched teachers have to prioritise the curriculum and assessment. This project is often run as an add-on, extracurricular activity, and not all schools or teachers have the capacity to do that.
- Cultural perceptions of Shakespeare. Even teachers may have a poor understanding of Shakespeare or see him as culturally elite, and so not want to engage with the project.
- Funding cuts. A decade ago, the teachers participating were often drama teachers from schools with drama departments. These departments and teachers have been cut dramatically.
- The schools that take part are generally rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding. Other schools (requires improvement or inadequate) do not tend to take part, possibly because they do not feel that they have the capacity to take part.

Challenges since COVID-19:

- The challenges have not changed per se, but have been made exponentially worse and it is too early to tell how this will look and what the effects will be.
- Between 750 and 800 schools were due to take part in the Shakespeare Schools Festival, but this number has dropped to between 250 and 300.
- They have adapted the programme to be delivered online with recorded performances.
- The unique selling point of the project is the location and the opportunity for children to perform on a professional theatre stage, which cannot happen under current restrictions.
- Local theatres have had to use the furlough scheme so maintaining communications and relationships with them has been made much more difficult.

Future Challenges:

- They are setting out a strategy pathway until 2023. One change is that they will run the festival all year round in order to cater for the needs of schools more effectively. 2021 will be another year of considerable disruption as the unique selling point of the programme will not be able to be realised.
- Rebuilding expertise in schools and the way in which the programme is perceived. Without the promise of performing on a professional stage, which was the culmination of the programme in its past iteration, they risk schools

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25 Ibid.
losing interest and so they need to maintain good relationships with schools and keep them engaged in creative processes. Overall, this broadens opportunities, but the immediate future will be more difficult to navigate.

- Funding remains a concern, particularly as we head towards another recession. Schools have spent money to become COVID-secure and so will have less money available for extra-curricular activities. The Shakespeare Schools Foundation has received 42% less income than last year. It will be important to make a case for their programme be a way of rebuilding with children and young people.
- The effects of exhaustion and morale on teachers and schools. Some schools remain eager to defend the arts, but others will need to focus time and resources on the basics and helping children to catch up.

**Effects at National and Local Level**

- Much of the work became digital over the summer. Instead of having face-to-face workshops for a day, they did it as a two-hour evening seminar for six weeks. The loss of face-to-face workshops (with 30 or so teachers) lost some of the local flavour and expertise, but the digital space was shared by 150-200 people which helped participants to realise the scale of the project and to share aspirations to do something special and exciting at a time when it would have been easier not to do that. It gave it a true national feeling that they hope to continue going forward.
- The need for constant re-adapting has made the charity more aware of local issues with schools.

**Cohesion**

- COVID has set back the agenda of bringing people into arts venues. 95% the audiences who went to the local venues to watch their children perform said that they would go back. This will have been severely damaged after a year. The value of live theatre needs to be shown to people who are not usually theatre goers. The disparity in funding between venues could become a problem and local theatres risk being lost, which will put off potential audiences even further.

**Inequalities**

- Digital divide. COVID has highlighted issues of access to the internet and computers for pupils. Disadvantaged pupils will fall further behind through lack of access.
- The lack of social contact will have an effect on children’s speech and language skills, for example children for whom English is a second language: if English is not spoken at home and they do not have regular social contact English speakers because of lockdown and self-isolation then their English language skills are likely to suffer.
- Nutrition and holiday hunger. It is impossible for pupils to concentrate and learn if they are hungry.
• Rise in domestic violence cases: children cannot concentrate or learn in unsafe environments, or when they are worried about returning to those environments.
Background

Seven Stories is the only museum dedicated to celebrating the exceptional achievements of British writers and illustrators and saving their work as part of the nation’s irreplaceable heritage, for the enjoyment and inspiration of current and future generations. Its unique Collection is the foundation on which Seven Stories rests. Since opening in 2005, its visitor centre has attracted over 1,000,000 visitors and, on average, its award-winning schools and community programmes engage with over 30,000 children and young people every year.

Sarah Cotton is responsible for developing all of Seven Stories’ community engagement and outreach projects that are delivered by the Creative Learning and Engagement Team, (CLE) and John Beattie is responsible for managing the delivering of the CLEs schools engagement activities. Both the community-focused and in-school engagement activities are delivered by Seven Stories’ team of Creative Associates. Over lockdown, Sarah Cotton managed the delivery of Seven Stories’ community-focused projects; these were delivered in the East End of Newcastle, primarily Byker, and were developed in close partnership with voluntary community organisations that Seven Stories was already working with. At the time of writing, no formal evaluations of the projects had been carried out.

- Seven Stories has three distinct communities it engages with: schools; doorstep communities from deprived areas of Byker/Walker, usually through outreach work; supporters of the visitor centre who tend to be largely middle class.
- Seven Stories’ social media followers, largely consisting of supporters of the visitor centre, have shown support for the community work Seven Stories has carried out during lockdown.
- Seven Stories’ work in the East End communities is helping to change the perception of Seven Stories, emphasising its work in the community and to raise literacy and reading for pleasure in the region.

COVID-19 Response – Community

Throughout lockdown, Seven Stories worked closely with their doorstep communities; in particular, working with local voluntary and community organisations to really understand children’s and families’ needs, and how Seven Stories could support them. The success and impact of this work, coming under the header ‘Something to Smile About’ was recognised in the Museums Change Lives Award, winning ‘Best Lockdown Project’.
Overall, working with Barnardo's Community Family Hub East, Food Nation and 'Byker Best Summer Ever' project led by the Byker Community Trust, Seven Stories offered 14 digital story times, 35 doorstep storytelling performances, 367 books, 345 lockdown story packs, family activity packs, 600 hot meals and 225 recipe packs to 126 families in Byker. They also worked with Byker Primary School and St Lawrence's RC Primary School to provide 28 digital story times and story-inspired activities for use with keyworker children and families schooling at home. The resources and activities aimed to support those families who would be disproportionately affected by the national lockdown and support positive mental health, wellbeing, and resilience during uncertain times.

Esmee Ward, Director of Manchester Museum and judge for Museums Change Lives Awards 2020 said: “The judges love pretty much everything about this project. You really got the sense of a museum that is connected to the needs of its communities. They acted quickly and thoughtfully to support local families with literacy, home schooling and they did that both online and on the doorstep via storytelling sessions. What we really loved as well is that they worked in partnership with multiple organisations and businesses. They were not only delivering literacy, books and resources but also linked this to food and recipe packs, gardening inspirations and much, much more. In spite of a small budget their impact was far reaching and felt right across Byker. Many congratulations, Seven Stories are worthy winners!”

'Stories for Life'

This project has funding for 3 years from Children in Need. Its success depends on Seven Stories’ collaboration with local community organisations who refer families most in need to Seven Stories. Over the main lockdown, Seven Stories worked with Community Family Hub East, a family centre with responsibility for the North East, working specifically in Walker and Byker. The project involved video story times and delivering packs of food, creative activities and the resources needed to do the activities to people’s houses. Initially the story times were available to anyone who could look at the community family hub website. The aims of the programme focus on child development, early communication skills, improving family relationships, and well-being.

Inequalities of arts resources

- The projects were led by the families’ needs, which were identified by the community organisations who looked to work with Seven Stories to meet these. Families were asking for things for the children to do.
- Families lacked resources to be creative at home with their children.
- ‘One of the schools shared with us an example of one child who didn't own a single coloured pen or pencil. . . they suggested to children that they could draw rainbows and put them in the windows and one child didn't even have a single pencil.’ (Sarah)

Cohesion- promoting family reading and activities
• The programme was designed to encourage positive family relationships through spending time together and having fun through sharing stories and activities. Positive attitudes to reading show some correlation with wellbeing.26
• Secure and supportive families are recognised factors in children’s development of good language skills and a protective factor in terms of personal resilience.27
• Children are more likely to read for pleasure in a supportive home environment and where books and reading are valued.28
• Reading for pleasure is a more accurate predictor of success in life than the social class of parents.29
• Books were selected that would enable children to talk about their feelings and anxieties with their families, e.g., Tom Percival’s picture-book, Ruby’s Worry.
• The books and activities were selected and designed for children and their families to explore well-being themes: friendship, belonging, supporting, valuing others. Research shows that listening to stories affirms children’s knowledge of themselves and others and provides multiple connections from literature to life.
• ‘Stories for Life’ was aimed at children aged 0-5, but Seven Stories know from verbal feedback that older siblings joined in and shared the activities.
• ‘Human contact at the door has been really valued by families and there has been a massive need; a lot of people have said that they haven’t seen anyone in weeks other than us.’ (Sarah)

Story Kitchen project.

Background

This project, funded by Well Newcastle Gateshead, using food and stories, was aimed at primary age children and their families who were referred by Byker Primary School as being the most vulnerable. Seven Stories staff delivered food-themed children’s books, video story times, and creative activities such as growing tomatoes and cress to encourage positive family interaction through reading, cooking and creative arts.

Inequalities

- Families lack the resources to do creative activities together.
- Informal feedback: ‘that's amazing because the bairn's been asking to make a cake all week and I don't get paid till next week, so I couldn't . . . I didn't have any ingredients. So that means that we've been able to do what she wanted to do’. (Sarah)

In Schools

Reader in Residence (Background)

The Reader in Residence programme usually takes place in school. A Seven Stories Creative Associate is places in a school to work with the whole school community, usually one day a week, to work on reading for pleasure and improved literacy. During lockdown, the Reader in Residence programmes moved online. The Creative Associate shared story-times and creative activities for all year groups at Byker Primary School and St Lawrence Primary School. This activity was funded by the St Nicholas Educational Trust.

Impact on positive attitudes to reading:

“The Reader in Residence scheme has supported our children to find a true love and thirst for stories. Through the interactive story sessions delivered by Megan ALL our EYFS children have blossomed in confidence when joining in… to have a deep understanding of the meaning behind new language and the story itself.” Byker Primary School (Seven Stories website)

Opportunities due to digital engagement

- The Seven Stories Creative Associate was able to develop stories and create activities that were shared with hundreds of school families, far more than is possible through the face-to-face programme.
- The Creative Associate developed resources that were shared with the entire school. These were shared digitally, schools made hardcopies available if families needed them.
- Publishers’ permissions made this tricky but were worked around.

Family cohesion

- For the families that accessed the Reading in Residence programme at home, streamed by the schools, John Beattie said that they know from informal feedback that families were sharing the story-times among whole families.
- ‘The story times we were sharing were being used by whole families, not just the child that they were intended for. Where we had story times that were being shared for reception children, older siblings were joining to sit and listen to them as well, and so they were actually able to share stories as a family in a way that they weren’t able to in school.’ (John)

Trust and Opportunities
• Working with the schools during lockdown has strengthened their relationship, building extra trust.
• 'I think when lockdown hit . . . we were able to pivot quickly to find a way to support them, I think that built extra trust with the schools. . . that felt like a moment when they went, okay, you are in it with us, you're not just here because you can be.' (John)

Future Challenges
• Getting permissions from publishers can be difficult.

Authors in Schools events, sponsored by First Supply - now delivered digitally

Over 5,400 children in 45 schools across the U.K. are taking part in one of Seven Stories’ Authors into Schools events between September and October 2020. In addition, between September 2020 and March 2021 there have been over 115,000 attendances at Authors in Schools events. The Authors in Schools events have a positive impact on reading for pleasure.

• 100% of teachers and librarians said children are more likely to pick up a book to read for pleasure as a result of a Seven Stories Author into Schools event (*Survey results compiled October 2020)

Future Challenges
• Seven Stories have an ongoing difficulty in gathering feedback data on their work; often feedback is very informal and verbal, and they are reliant on partners, i.e., schools, to gather it.
• This informal feedback tells them that their work impacts positively on children’s attitudes to reading and particularly reading for pleasure, which in turn, positively impacts on their mental wellbeing and educational success.30
• To really understand the extent of this positive impact, and how to better help the children they work with, they need to develop robust evaluative methodologies and to work with partners to do this.
• Achieving such evaluative data has only been made more difficult because of COVID-19. Schools’ pandemic health and safety risk assessments do not allow visitors into school. This situation is likely to change very gradually over the next academic year.

30 Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018.
Dr Sarah Hill (Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies, School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University)

Sarah has a background in film and media studies and is Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Newcastle University. Her current research looks at disability, girlhood, and online self-representation.

Challenges/Opportunities of Research (pre-COVID-19)

- There were opportunities to see how self-representation plays out on social media – for example, how disabled girls make themselves visible online.
- Disabled girl bloggers were taking on an educative role for able-bodied people. This raises some interesting questions, such as: What emotional labour does this involve? How do they engage with post-feminist discourses?
- It was difficult to recruit people to participate in a study.

Challenges/Opportunities (Current)

- Sarah was unable to start a pilot study because of COVID-19. This is due to start in new year.
- The Critical Frailty Scale was being used and could have impacted disabled people. The CFS is usually only applied to people over the age of 65 and has not been designed for use in younger people or those with a long-term physical or learning disability. Lawyers became involved to prevent the use of the CFS for decisions about treatment related to COVID-19 and younger people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities. Given this context, the ethical implications of her research, and the fears and anxieties surrounding COVID-19, Sarah decided to postpone her pilot project during the pandemic.

Short-term Challenges

- The study will now be informed by COVID-19 – it is likely that there will be a shift in the kinds of social media posts. An interview component will ask questions about COVID-19 and their experiences.
- The pilot study will inform a bigger research bid (3 years).
- Difficulties in recruiting participants.

Longer-term Challenges

- Most of the research will be conducted online anyway due to accessibility, but COVID-19 means that the likelihood of being able to conduct any in-person events is decreased even in a couple of years’ time.

Inequalities

31 See https://www.acutefrailtynetwork.org.uk/Clinical-Frailty-Scale.
There is a clear sense that clinical vulnerability has been couched in terms of older people (e.g., use of CFS).  
Difficulty of shielding for younger people. Have these clinically vulnerable people been forgotten about?
The onus is placed on the individual disabled young person to shield and remove themselves from society (anecdotal). Sarah suspects that people feel more disabled than before because of these restrictions (anecdotal).
The rate of deaths of people with learning disabilities has gone up. (It rose by 134% during first wave.)

Cohesion

Online disability support networks were already in existence – it is likely that these have continued.

Additional Sources:

Dr Sarah Winkler-Reid (Lecturer in Social Anthropology, Northumbria University)

In 2017, working with Dr Sarah Ralph from Northumbria University, Sarah set up Girl-Kind North East, which is based on their research on girls’ lives and growing up in Britain. The Girl-Kind programme involves a series of workshops run for girls in the North East that leads up to the UN International Day of the Girl. The workshops eschew a problem centred focus to ask girls what life is like for them growing up in the North East. The girls decide what theme or topic they want to focus on, and how they want to express it to others. They often explore these subjects creatively, through film-making, dance, poetry, etc., and present their creations to family, friends and invited guests at a special event for the International Day of the Girl.

The number of schools wanting to participate in Girl-Kind workshops is steadily growing: from an initial two schools in 2017 to 10 schools in 2019. Girl-Kind have now worked with over 300 girls. Feedback and case-studies from the Girl-Kind programme evidence that young people, parents, and staff recognise the positive impact it has on confidence (Girl-Kind Report, 2020).

Impact of COVID-19 on Girl-Kind

- COVID-19 did not have a significant impact on the programme as they had decided to take a break in 2020 to review the programme. Essentially, the programme had reached its limit within the current funding structure and they are considering how to re-structure the organisation to ensure sustainability.
- A one-off event ‘Screen Takeover’ event (a workshop and film viewing for Girl-Kind girls) in partnership with the Tyneside Cinema planned for April 2020 was cancelled.
- Launched ‘GK@home’ using padlet.

Barriers during lockdown

- Conforming to ethical requirements, GDPR and online safeguarding meant that direct contact could not be made with Girl-Kind girls, and contact needed to be mediated via teachers.
- Logistics of reaching out to girls through schools was very difficult due to school closures and pressure on teachers. This impacted on the range of things Girl-Kind was able to offer and the take-up of ‘GK@home’.
- During past Girl-Kinds teachers usually communicated with girls in person during the school day and so they did not necessarily have pre-existing mailing lists to communicate with Girl-Kind girls.
- If there had been time, they would have thought about how to contact girls directly in advance. Once lockdown started, it was not possible to do this.
- Awareness that not all girls would have easy access to digital technologies.
- It was not easy to replicate the collaborative, supportive and accepting dynamic of Girl-Kind workshops online.

Opportunities
• The Girl-Kind programme does not assume a problem centred approach, it does not impose assumptions/ideas on the girls, including that the pandemic has been an overarching experience for the girls or is their most pressing concern. The programme would allow girls to explore their experiences, enabling better understanding of how they have been impacted by it.

Challenges going forward

• Pressure on schools to make up for lost educational attainment.
• Past experience shows that the programme does not work as an afterschool programme. The take-up is significantly affected. It needs to run in school time.
• Sarah: ‘it's often boys who are prioritised over girls because boys don’t do as well according to the benchmarks of educational attainment even though girls tend to suffer more with mental health and well-being.’
• Difficulties doing ethnographic research as researchers cannot go into schools.
• Recognising the stress schools and teachers are under: ‘We always want Girl-Kind to be something for schools to be able to offer, and that’s helpful, and that’s why we’ve had such good ongoing relationships with schools. But it’s also recognizing that it is extra work. So you know, at the point when you’re at 97% and you’ve got 3% to give to Girl-Kind, but what about when you’re already at 110%?’

Further Sources:


Professor Sinéad Morrissey spoke about two events organized by the Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts (NCLA): The Newcastle Poetry Festival and the Newcastle Poetry Competition.

The Newcastle Poetry Festival is one of the biggest poetry festivals in the UK involving international poets, cross-arts commissions, music, readings and workshops. The Newcastle Poetry Competition runs as part of the festival: NCLA started a young people’s prize (11-18) in 2019 with free entry and accompanied by school workshops. A special event was created at the 2019 festival for the winners and their families:

‘It was a real highlight of the festival to see our prize-winners arrive with their parents and their teachers and read their poems. And to have them on the same stage with top poets from all over the world as part of our festival programme. It was such a boost for the young people.’

In 2020, as an extension of the success of the 2019 competition, NCLA expanded their planned engagement with young people in the region. A full day’s workshop was planned with Tony Childs, Chief AQA Examiner, the poet Imtiaz Dharker, who has become Chancellor of Newcastle University, as well as several NCLA poets whose work is on the G.C.S.E and ‘A’ level curricula. They planned a whole day of workshops, poetry readings, expert sessions on approaching poetry questions at G.C.S.E for local schools - drawing on the network of school contacts provided by the Education and Outreach Officers of the Robinson Library’s Special Collections – which Sinéad describes as crucial.

As a result of lockdown, the 2020 Poetry Festival was cancelled and NCLA were able to quickly adapt to run a digital event, Inside Writing.

Opportunities during lockdown

Importance of poetry in times of crisis and positive well-being

- Poetry was extremely popular during lockdown.
- Poetry acts as ‘a live conduit that bolsters people’ and has a role that ‘can play directly in well-being.’

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[https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08893675.2015.980133](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08893675.2015.980133)
NCLA used the Inside Writing festival to test out the limits of digital events. The festival included digital book launches, poetry readings, lectures, and commissioning of new work. Everything was conducted via Zoom and/or posted on the NCLA Community Archive website with accompanying writing challenges aimed at the general public.

NCLA’s Research Associate Theresa Muñoz has also worked extensively with the Poetry Society’s Young Poets Network to build on the digital Bloodaxe archive that was developed through the Poetics of the Archive project, funded by the AHRC. The YPN has issued NCLA-devised writing challenges based on materials held in the Bloodaxe Archive to young poets all over the world. Prior to lockdown NCLA devised four challenges based on the Bloodaxe Archive. During lockdown, NCLA extended this work to include archival material from the Human Cell Atlas international research project. Young people surveyed after taking part in these projects reflected on how the writing challenges had changed their thinking about creativity:

‘Young people were saying how they’d never thought of archives as a creative resource before. And they really enjoyed the challenges – the project had made them see their own creative practice in a new light. So it was really successful.’

**Community**

‘Our workshops were so successful for the poetry competition because we were able to use the Robinson Library’s network of schools. Without these contacts, it would have been more difficult to find a community of young people to reach out to.’

**Inequalities and barriers to digital access**

- Digital engagement overcomes physical barriers to participation.
• Digital platforms have the potential to reach bigger audiences.
• But digital access is not a given.
• Working with whole school cohorts, especially in disadvantaged areas, has the potential to reach more people who would really benefit.
• It can be more difficult to build communities digitally rather than face-to-face.

‘Even though the digital has all that potential to reach wider audiences, and more international audiences, I do also wonder about who’s not in the Zoom Room, who’s not in that digital space?’

**Impact on well-being of young people – physical contact**

• Sinéad thinks that the in-person Poetry Festival in 2019, with the young poet’s award presentation, was potentially more impactful than the digital substitute in 2020.

‘In terms of self-esteem, aspiration building and the kinds of crucial work with young people on supporting positive self-identities and social resilience, physical events can be more memorable and therefore more impactful than other forms of digital engagement, even if those other forms have other kinds of benefits and potential.’

‘There’s a massive question about to how measure impact in the Arts. Often the impact of work in the Arts is long-term, multi-faceted and difficult to measure via any kind of system reliant on the limitations of data sets. We urgently need more imaginative ways of capturing the consequences of our work in these areas which do not diminish the nature of the influence. Until we can do this, we could be left struggling to make a case about the positive impact of engagement with the Arts on people’s lives—which in so many ways we already know to be the case.’
Publications and resources

BAME Communities


Disabilities


Education, Digital Delivery and Attainment Gap


https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4119/schools_responses_to_COVID_19_the_challenges_facing_schools_and_pupils_in_september_2020.pdf

Education and Teaching


Food Poverty, Education, and Holiday Provision


**Health and Wellbeing**


10 Nov. 2020. 'Music, Singing and Well-being in Healthy Adults' https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/music-singing-and-wellbeing/

**North East England**


**Poverty Proofing the School Day**

https://dro.dur.ac.uk/27316/1/27316.pdf?DDD29+hqgc43

**Racism**


**Reports**


**Additional Websites**


Campaign for Social Science. Home - Campaign for Social Science
Children’s Rights Judgements Project: https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH/M009033/1#/tabOverview


Discover Society. Covid-19 UK: Responding to the needs of asylum seekers in challenging and dangerous times | Discover Society

North East Young Lads and Dads. https://www.neydl.uk/
