

**CLiNKs**

Supporting the voluntary sector  
working in the criminal justice system

**National  
Criminal Justice  
Arts Alliance**



# The stolen generations



**Offering creative writing, visual art and  
dance to young people in secure centres**

**November 2022**

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Cover photo: Dance artists Arran Green and Glen Thomas in rehearsals with choreographer Gary Lang, responding to the creative work of the participants at Aycliffe Secure Centre. Dance City, Newcastle, UK. © Simon Veit-Wilson



## About the NCJAA case study series

A key thread running through the work of the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA) is to encourage good practice within the arts and criminal justice sector. To do this we run a professional mentoring scheme, hold specialised training events, produce good practice resources and manage an online Evidence Library of key research and evaluation documents on the impact of arts-based interventions within the criminal justice system.

On top of this we want to investigate and share some of the excellent work already happening in the sector. Our case studies series focuses on interesting collaborations between arts and criminal justice organisations, exploring how they work together, and the impact creative practice has on participants and the process of rehabilitation.

## About the Stolen Generations Project

The Stolen Generations Project delivered workshops in dance, creative writing and visual art for young people (aged 11-15) at Aycliffe Secure Centre, all informed by Indigenous Australian culture and dance practice. The project aimed to engage the young people who would not otherwise easily access the arts. It also feeds into a wider project, *The Other Side of Me*, led by two academics at Northumbria University: Dr Laura Fish, a writer and Assistant Professor in creative writing, and Liz Pavey, Assistant Professor in dance and performance.

The workshops offered the young people at Aycliffe opportunities to create high quality work with experienced practitioners, which culminated in displays of artwork and creative writing and the young people engaging in performances with professional dance artists. This included:

- **Stage 1 (2018)** – an intensive themed half-term week exploring the concepts of displacement and ‘otherness’ with Dance United Yorkshire using storytelling and workshops in dance or creative writing and visual art
- **Stage 2 (2020)** – one day of visual art sessions and one day of dance workshops with opportunities to work with Black British and Indigenous Australian dance artists (NT Dance Company).

The project explores the language of expression with a focus on traditional Indigenous Australian cultures. As such, the workshops at Aycliffe included discussions around relationships to place and land, as well as displacement, handling traditional artefacts including instruments – clapsticks, a didgeridoo, decoratively carved boab nuts – and used dot paintings of animals native to Australia as key motifs, as well as enabling participants to embody aspects of Indigenous Australian dance and respond to Indigenous music.

Overall, the project encouraged self-expression; improved self-esteem and self-confidence, emotional wellbeing, communication and social skills; offered experience of engaging in small group work; built upon creative skills; increased literacy and listening skills; and encouraged discussions around cultural diversity.





Masks, ankle and wrist bands painted for dance performance by participants at Aycliffe Secure Centre



# Participating organisations

## Aycliffe Secure Centre

Aycliffe Secure Centre is a secure children's home providing high quality, specialist secure accommodation for young people between the ages of 10 and 18. They also have their own school.

[www.durham.gov.uk/aycliffesecurecentre](http://www.durham.gov.uk/aycliffesecurecentre)

## Northumbria University

Northumbria University is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. The university's strategic partnerships with BALTIC Centre for contemporary Art, Great North Run Culture, Live Theatre, New Writing North, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, and Tyneside Cinema create thriving, stimulating communities of artists, practitioners, students, and staff who collaborate with experts in the fields of science, the environment, the arts and humanities, and health and medicine, to generate new ways of thinking and creative practice.

[www.northumbria.ac.uk](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk)

## Dance United Yorkshire

Dance United Yorkshire delivers bespoke projects modelled on contemporary dance training and performance, working in partnership with frontline organisations across the West Yorkshire region. They strive for their intensive dance-based interventions to have a recognised place within mainstream programmes of education, social inclusion, mental health and criminal justice. Programmes are delivered by an integrated team of specialist dance facilitators and support staff and they are developed for a range of specific client groups, including: young people in the following categories: NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training); under Youth Offending Teams; within Pupil Referral Units; identified by Families First teams; at risk of sexual exploitation.

[www.duy.org.uk](http://www.duy.org.uk)

## NT Dance Company

Based in Australia's Northern Territory, NT Dance Company is Indigenous-owned. Their key objectives include supporting youth diversion and rehabilitation programmes and promoting opportunities for disadvantaged youth to engage with the highest level of quality dance creation, production and performance. They have delivered programmes to provide remote based Indigenous youth with opportunities to learn to dance.

[www.ntdance.org](http://www.ntdance.org)





Participants at Aycliffe Secure Centre engaging with art work

## Evaluation, outcomes and impact

### Aims – achievement

The workshops at Aycliffe achieved the stated aims:

- Offer a range of art forms to young people who cannot easily access the arts – by developing sessions tailored to suit the participants and bringing artists in to work with the young people resident at Aycliffe
- Provide opportunities to develop new skills and build upon existing strengths to reach artistic excellence – by setting realistic yet ambitious standards and modelling high quality practice for participants
- Validate participants' contributions and inspire continued artistic endeavour – through continuous encouragement and praise of the participants from initial contact through to final performances and presentations of certificates
- Encourage self-expression, improve self-esteem, develop self-confidence and emotional wellbeing – the dance performances in particular enabled participants to challenge themselves further than they or staff had expected
- Ensure the individual (rather than the individual's offending) is at the heart of the creative work – the organisers were not privy to the reasons each young person was there and took the participants as they met them
- Ignite young people's imaginations, support them in versing emotions and initiate change through the transformative power of dance – the project shared with the young people the themes of identity, displacement, confinement, loss, and knowledge of Indigenous Australian culture, engaging their imaginations and emotions
- Support participants with developing skills needed to cope with life outside the Secure Centre and reduce capacity for reoffending and anti-social behaviour – it is difficult to assess the lasting effect, however staff members identified that the work offered opportunities for meeting new people, and developing communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills.



Creative team group photo in rehearsals at Dance City, Newcastle, UK (left to right: Gary Lang, Liz Pavey, Laura Fish, Glen Thomas, Arran Green)

## Participation

Approximately half of the young people resident at Aycliffe engaged with the project.

Several factors impacted on the number of young people able to participate:

- **Vulnerability** – some of the residents were highly vulnerable and it was not appropriate for them to work together in large groups. Out of those who did participate, many of the young people were reluctant to remove their shoes in the dance sessions (the Centre explained that it could be a struggle to get vulnerable participants to even take their coats off when indoors). Flexibility was key and a number of participants who felt inhibited in the dance workshops were able to benefit from the opportunity to explore another form of creative expression by joining an art and/or creative writing session. Some participants tried all three of the artforms. This allowed for trying new artforms and playing to their own strengths.
- **Timings** – the young people were given other options during the half-term Themed Week e.g. recreational activities. There were advantages and disadvantages of working in the half-term week – on the one hand, it offered scope to work with the young people all day every day, on the other hand, many young people instead chose to remain within their allocated houses and engage in alternative activities. It has been suggested that participants are offered weekly taster sessions for the Themed Week a full term in advance of any similar projects we might offer in the future. This approach would build relationships with staff and young people and establish the project more firmly within the Centre. It was also recommended that further visits were offered following the Themed Week to support the project's legacy.

# Testimonials from participants and staff

## Ann Haigh, Deputy Centre Manager

Ann Haigh said the project assisted in raising participants' self-esteem, for example, she said of participant C, who completed the entire week of dance and took part in the performance, that engaging in the project was "a real positive in her life" and "she couldn't believe that the audience came to watch her." Ann spoke of the lasting positive effect the experience has had on this participant.

She said she would very much like the project to be repeated at Aycliffe and/or made available to young offenders within the community and in children's homes e.g. before and after attending a residential secure unit like Aycliffe. She said this kind of project can be particularly good for young people in residential units because it can help to identify skills or areas – artistic, recreational or otherwise – the children are good at and enjoy, and this can be useful for supporting and guiding them towards activities when they leave.

## Participant 1

*"I enjoyed meeting new people and taking part... It felt good to express yourself. I learnt a backward roll and was so happy... It took me away from arguments in the house, gave me some space. I was so happy doing it and was upset when it was over. I'm glad I've got the memory of it and what they taught me. It upped my confidence. I used to get angry and punch things. I don't feel as angry as much – I think the week helped."*

## Participant 2

*"I did paintings, of mountains and stuff, and bracelets for the dance and masks. The bracelets were fun to do. Enjoyed the storytelling, where we picked out a picture of a person and told their story. Felt alright afterwards. Felt the same than before, but in a good way, in a happy mood, but had fun."*

## Participant 3

*"It has been helpful with my confidence. I felt less confident before."*

## Staff member 1

*"It was a boost for self-confidence. They learnt new skills, not only dance, but how to express themselves. Learnt to adapt to meeting new people, so networking and communication skills too. The outcome was great. [Participant 1] puts more detail and attention into things now, like artwork, and tasks given."*

## Staff member 2

*"They learnt something new, they seemed to enjoy it and it was fitness. And when they started relying on each other it was teamwork and interpersonal skills."*





Masks painted for dance performance by participants at Aycliffe Secure Centre



## Further resources and links

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### The Other Side of Me

[www.filmfreeway.com/TheOtherSideofMe819](http://www.filmfreeway.com/TheOtherSideofMe819)

### Bangarra Dance Theatre

[www.bangarra.com.au](http://www.bangarra.com.au)

### Dance City – Dance for the North East

[www.dancecity.co.uk](http://www.dancecity.co.uk)

### Surface Area Dance Theatre

[www.surfacearea.org.uk](http://www.surfacearea.org.uk)

### The National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association Dance College (NAISDA)

[www.naisda.com.au](http://www.naisda.com.au)

### West Australian Ballet

[www.waballet.com.au](http://www.waballet.com.au)

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## Our vision

Our vision is of a vibrant, independent and resilient voluntary sector that enables people to transform their lives.

## Our mission

To support, represent and advocate for the voluntary sector in criminal justice, enabling it to provide the best possible opportunities for individuals and their families.

## Join Clinks: be heard, informed, and supported

### Are you a voluntary organisation supporting people in the criminal justice system?

Join our network of over 600 members. Clinks membership offers you:

- A voice to influence change
- Practical assistance to be effective and resilient
- Support from a community of like-minded professionals.

Membership starts at just £20 per year and is free for organisations with little income.

[www.clinks.org/membership](http://www.clinks.org/membership)

## Our vision

Our vision is to ensure the arts are used within the criminal justice system as a springboard for positive change. We provide a network to promote, develop and support high quality arts practice in criminal justice settings, influencing and informing government, commissioners and the public.

## Our members

We currently have over 900 individuals and organisations in our network delivering creative opportunities to people in prison, on probation and in the community, with impressive, internationally recognised results.

## Get in touch

☎ 020 4502 6774

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🐦 @ArtsCJS

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