



# THE COURTHOUSE REPORT 2016



“The Courthouse has been a great venue for raising the profile of FolkActive’s activities and was the ideal venue for our Folk Educators Group meeting - a national networking group of folk arts educators from across England and beyond. Many of the delegates commented on the vibrancy of the Courthouse, and on the transformation of the building into such a positive and enabling space.”

Jo Harmer, FolkActive

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN...

From late July 2014 to November 2015, SoCo Music Project, a not-for-profit music organisation based in Hampshire, took over residency of the old magistrates court building on Leigh Road Eastleigh, in partnership with Eastleigh Borough Council (EBC).

In recent years, EBC have been very supportive of the arts and culture in Eastleigh, supporting the development of a number of spaces that enable innovative arts practice to flourish: The Point is an inspiring venue for contemporary dance, theatre and combined arts, The Sorting Office provides office and workshop space for designer-makers and the Tec Hub is a creative and technical space for digital start-ups and creatives to work, meet and network. SoCo had initial conversations with Cheryl Butler, Head of Culture at EBC, who was seeking to put together a complimentary offer of music and messy art in the borough.

As a leading music organisation in Hampshire and with a successful track record of developing and running creative community spaces, SoCo were well placed to achieve this. SoCo previously ran the Creative Hub in Southampton’s Bargate Centre and also runs Hightown Studios, a community recording studio in Thornhill. Following the closure of the Creative Hub in 2013, SoCo had been in touch with both Southampton City Council and EBC about potentially opening up unused council owned buildings for arts activities.

The building chosen for this project by EBC was the old magistrates court on Leigh Road that had laid dormant for several years prior to SoCo taking up residency. The large stand-alone building built in the 1960s was surrounded by a car park, playing fields and opposite to council buildings that became unused shortly after SoCo’s tenure.

Despite the building being in a poor condition both inside and out, the site was ideally located as a venue for music and arts practice as there would be no concerns around noise restrictions and it also had good access to the M3 motorway. The spacious courtrooms within were ideal for creative workshops and events and had already been acoustically treated. The building was a short distance from Eastleigh Town Centre but due to its location had minimal footfall and no history of creative use.

SoCo moved in to The Courthouse on a temporary 1-year contract on heavily reduced rates and rent. Our vision was for it to be treated as a ‘pop-up project’ and to get as much creative activity going as quickly as possible. We knew that to accomplish this we would need to get a number of partners on board but simply by unlocking this building for community engagement the potential could be huge and exciting.

On minimal budget and utilising much of SoCo’s own music equipment, SoCo and partners were able to redevelop the space into a safe, vibrant and creative environment for the local community. This included specially adapted workshop spaces, rehearsal rooms, an art gallery, artist pods and a community café.

Following The Courthouse’s official launch in late October 2015, a number of organisations set up residency as creative partners of The Courthouse, including film makers, musicians, fine artists and designer makers. The Courthouse brought together much collaboration and became a prominent and important space for artists to both work and develop and perform/showcase, whilst also offering creative workshops and events for the local community.

“It’s a friendly atmosphere. You can have drinks and socialize and it’s a very relaxing space. This is important socially for our users. It’s a neutral place where people can be themselves and not be judged. For some of the participants, the Courthouse has formed part of their social life in that they now come here for other events. This space does a lot more than medication for a lot of individuals. Medication will only neutralize the effects, whereas if they can create a social life and positive wellbeing around them then that’s really going to make a difference in their lives and create positive change.”

Ruth Webster, Wellbeing Manager, Solent Mind



# PHYSICAL FEATURES

The Courthouse was a two floor building totalling 1000 m2 that comprised of over 20 office spaces, 3 versatile courtrooms used as workshop/performance/conference spaces, 7 artist pods, 1 meeting room, a computer suite, 2 band rehearsal rooms, 2 small kitchens, several storage rooms, a large car park and both a reception/café area and art gallery that were open to the public.

The building was large enough to run multiple activities; the number and versatility of the rooms enabled groups to utilise breakout spaces in addition to workshop rooms.

One of our projects utilised the building itself as a large canvas in order to transform the drab grey building into an inspiring piece of art. To achieve this we partnered up with a well known visual artist from London to create several life-like graffiti murals around the outside of the building. Within the building itself, there was an abundance of creativity on display with instruments, artwork and bright paintwork/murals on many walls.

As an old building from the 1960s, The Courthouse needed a lot of work doing to it in order to make it a safe and usable creative space and was also hugely expensive to heat as it had poor insulation. Without acquiring any funding for builders/labourers, SoCo and volunteers needed to:

- Paint walls/doors/flooring
- Create partition walls for artist pods and gallery space
- Create stage/performance area by stripping out courtroom benches
- Strip out upstairs courtroom carpet and lay laminate flooring
- Acquire furniture for café area, offices, workshop spaces, meeting and conference rooms
- Create mini acoustic stage in reception/cafe area
- Create computer and recording suite
- Turn the building into a creative/artistic canvas both inside and out
- Acoustic paneling and treatment to workshop/performance rooms.

With greater financial resources and a longer tenancy, SoCo would have liked to have fixed the heating problems, refurbished all used rooms to a higher standard, enabled access to rooms that were deemed unusable due to leaks and mould and provide greater security measures for the building.

The Courthouse upstairs was largely inaccessible to people with physical disabilities, therefore, it was important to ensure that the downstairs event and workshop areas would be safe, inclusive and accessible to all. Through The Courthouse, SoCo wanted to promote the importance of equality and diversity which is integral to our programmes of work.

“The large rehearsal space enabled us to quickly expand and develop the club. It’s no exaggeration to say that partnering with the SoCo team, and its’ facilities, has enabled us to really make a difference musically, and socially, to a growing number of players.”

Martin Dearlove, Hampshire Guitar Club

# PARTNERS

An important part of The Courthouse project was to nurture new and emerging creative organisations by providing them with a space and opportunities to train, develop and grow. SoCo offered office and workshop spaces to creative organisations and individuals whose work was community focused and predominantly within Hampshire. SoCo had collaborated with some of these organisations in the past, whilst some had just started out and approached SoCo to find out about the opportunities available.

Simply by having a base to work from, many of our resident partner organisations were able to significantly expand their workload. They now had meeting, workshop, storage and office spaces along with opportunities to showcase their work all under one roof. Alongside this, strategic support for new creatives was provided by fellow resident partners based at The Courthouse.

The importance of collaborative work within The Courthouse project cannot be understated; partner organisations were able to support each other within the delivery of projects, providing business support, funding advice, sharing best practice techniques and resources and even successfully attracted funding together.

This approach towards supporting community organisations and promoting opportunities for the local community enabled a vibrant creative space to evolve and an exciting schedule of activities to develop.

The Courthouse provided a space where creative ideas and imagination could flourish. The fine artists and musicians in residence were provided 24/7 access to The Courthouse, enabling them to increase their creative output and work around other commitments.

The Courthouse afforded many resident organisations with hireable meeting and workshop spaces for regular activities or events, which complimented SoCo's creative offer. SoCo supported organisations with a community focus through reduced fees or in kind events/activities being provided for the local community as an exchange. This in turn provided vital support for emerging artists and organisations whilst increasing creative activity at The Courthouse for local residents. Profit-making organisations contributed towards a standard hire charge towards all spaces.



“The Courthouse has been the perfect environment for workshops as the main rooms and break out areas are used extensively for individual and collaborative elements of the songwriting sessions”

Jim Chorley, Music Leader

“The venue is superb, it’s like a small community of like minded individuals. There’s a feeling of opportunity and creativity.”

DJ Small Paul, Music Practitioner

# THE COURTHOUSE RESIDENTS



SoCo exists to promote and develop the creative and cultural offer in the region. We're a non profit organisation that works closely with youth organisations, homeless charities, mental health groups and schools to provide positive opportunities in music and the creative arts.

"The Courthouse was an incredible project for us to take on, it allowed us to develop our work, build exciting new partnerships and support the cultural offer in the area. Importantly it has given us the confidence to take on projects of this sort, the bigger the better!"

Matt Salvage, SoCo Music Project

"Having a large creative space is massively important and, without the continued support of SoCo and it's funding bodies, a lot of the work from the partners may have never seen the light of day! Being surrounded by like-minded people had an inspiring and creative impact."

Jimmy Alford, Amplified Guitar Tuition



Amplified Guitar Tuition provides guitar tuition and training for individuals and groups. They provide lessons, classes, workshops and training on all aspects of guitar/music. They also run 'Rock Club' as part of Music Clubs at The Courthouse.



The Sea Slugs are a 10 to 15 piece Afrobeat band. Aside from working as a band, playing exciting original music, The Sea Slugs are also committed to sharing music through delivering workshops. Afrobeat is a very communicable genre, which is easy to get involved in, through singing, dancing, playing percussion or playing any other instrument. It combines elements of funk, jazz, highlife and more traditional aspects of West African music such as percussion and call and response singing.

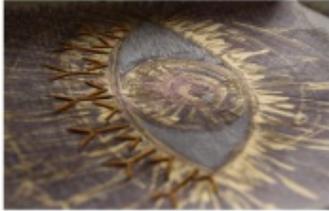
## MAMMOTH JEWELLERY

Mammoth Jewellery is a designer, sculptor and silversmith. Making and finishing of precious metal jewellery, the restoration of jewellery and antique objects of virtue, sculpting and carving small objects of art.

## STEVE WOODMAN

Steve Woodman is a designer/maker/artist and practical idea developer. He is currently developing a music based sculptural piece for community involvement.

# THE COURTHOUSE RESIDENTS



## LITTLE ART HAVEN

Little Art Haven's main focus is to provide a creative space for people across a range of ages and ability through the provision of a workshop space and imparting the skills of art journaling.

"We feel we really benefited, as a project just starting out, from the advice and example of more experienced people working in similar fields to our own. We feel truly blessed to have started out at this incredible space in the company of such a varied and talented array of people."

Zara Tatum, Little Art Haven

"We feel that this was a very rewarding experience - giving us the opportunity to reach-out to fellow film makers in the area and to share our skills with students and enthusiasts."

Phil Rowe, Focused Media



## FOCUSED MEDIA

Focused Media are creators of bespoke moving images. Comprehensive video production service for corporate clients and supplier of camera crew to the broadcast television industry.



The Marketing Collective was established in August 2010 to introduce a new approach to marketing where the focus is on collaboration. Passionate about design that influences, words that inspire and building excellent client relationships, their team love to listen, talk and create marketing communications for whatever size of business or budget.

"The Courthouse was such a great move for The Marketing Collective. It allowed us to be among other creative people and helped foster collaboration. It allowed people to come together and push personal boundaries."

Louise Collins, The Marketing Collective



## RAW ARTWORK

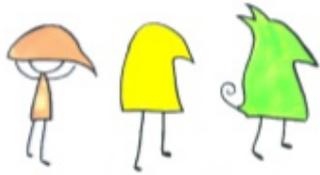
RAW Artwork nurtures local artists of all disciplines by providing 8 start-up studio spaces with an art gallery attached. Promoting local and emerging artists by organising specialist exhibitions of varying lengths of time, from 2 days to 2 months. RAW Artwork is the only public art gallery in Eastleigh.



## The Butterfly Fx

The Butterfly Fx is a digital arts and moving image organisation that works with diverse groups to provide inspirational and engaging projects. Their aim is to enable people to be artistically expressive through digital media. Their projects bring people together to explore their heritage, culture and issues, be creative, share stories and learn technical media skills.

# THE COURTHOUSE RESIDENTS



TreeCreeper Theatre

TreeCreeper provide community theatre and arts for all, working with all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Our goal is to enlighten and inspire through play. By creating thought provoking workshops, performances and bespoke community projects we aim to involve and empower. Exploring community led themes and topics using creative methods to communicate and discover new perspectives on important community issues. With devising at the heart of our theatre work, they are driven by the people they work with.

"The Courthouse brought artists of all genres together and enabled artistic freedom to develop. The buzz and community spirit present at The Courthouse provided the organisation space to grow, develop strong working relationships and to research and develop other new works."

Jen Walmsley, TreeCreeper

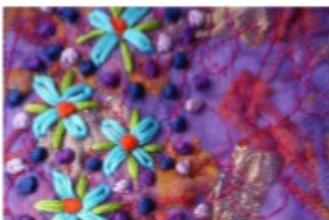
"Through The Courthouse we were able to interact with a large number of businesses and community groups and we feel this has been crucial to the growth of our business."

Emma Leighio, Broken Physics



## BROKEN PHYSICS

Broken Physics are a video production company who specialise in promotional & corporate videos, music videos, event coverage and DSLR workshops for adults & children.



## ARTYMESS

Artymess is a freelance Textile artist and teacher running workshops for basic sewing skills, creative experimental Textiles and Feltmaking. Driven to create, inspire and excite through colour and texture and dedicated to passing on skills to adults and children alike. Work is usually made from 'upcycled' fibres and fabrics, where possible, and is always colourful and uplifting.

## LIAM SCOTT

Liam is a freelance music technology practitioner, sound engineer and musician having graduated with a degree in Popular Music Production from Solent University. Liam currently performs as a live drummer for local band Nomura.

## trickyart

TrickArt represent poets, filmmakers, musicians, and artists who can work with your pupils, teachers, or organisation. They offer well priced CPD opportunities in and around the South of the UK, focussing on Animation, Filmmaking, iPad Orchestra, and how-to-make interactive iBooks.



Lily & Lime LD enables and supports young people with learning disabilities into sustainable pathways of employment through adapted learning and practical training programmes in partnership with Can Do training.



“As soon as I saw the facilities and support being offered to local artists and performers I knew that the Courthouse would be a superb opportunity and location to start a comedy writing and performing workshop. The opportunities that The Courthouse/SoCo provide have been extensive and invaluable. Several of our members would not have had the opportunity to perform at all without the support and facilities provided by the Courthouse.”

Richard Law, Courthouse Comedy Lab

## FUNDING

SoCo received no capital funding to help repair the building and so relied upon some of its reserves in order to undergo general building maintenance, purchase café equipment and flooring. Regular staff and volunteers put in overtime to get the rooms ready for use, from painting and setting up equipment/furniture to building the artist pods and café.

Soon after launching, SoCo were running regular workshops at The Courthouse through funding from Youth Music, delivering creative sessions to children and young people in challenging circumstances and providing open access provision through a variety of music activities.

European Social Funding and Southampton City Council special projects funding also enabled SoCo to provide regular creative adult learning opportunities throughout the duration of The Courthouse's existence. In addition to this, SoCo also successfully sought funding from Hampshire County Council to deliver two weekend music festivals in The Courthouse for young people: Urban X and Festival of International Music.

Income was generated through the rental of workshop, conference and rehearsal spaces (although these were often at heavily reduced rates for community organisations) and through the Courthouse Café. Resident organisations based at The Courthouse contributed rent through delivering in kind workshops, events and cover on the café whilst a number of third sector organisations contributed towards specific youth and/or adult courses with SoCo.

## ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

During The Courthouse's 16-month existence, SoCo and partner organisations delivered over 800 different activities for the local community. There were 141 adult learning sessions, 280 creative sessions for young people, 2 festivals, 13 gigs, 161 rehearsals, 3 conferences, 10 CPD or training opportunities, 8 theatre events and more. There really was something for everyone.

Some of the regular activities and groups that ran at The Courthouse, such as Comedy Lab, Loopy Loopers and The Courthouse Social Studios all emerged as a direct result of opening the doors to creative organisations and ideas. These groups would not have flourished if it wasn't for the opportunities afforded them by SoCo and The Courthouse.

By providing affordable space hire for community use, The Courthouse enabled smaller organisations and individuals to put on a variety of activities and events that would have been unaffordable in other venues and potentially would not have run. By providing this, the local community has benefitted greatly through an increase in participation in creative opportunities and activities.

Not only did The Courthouse run community focused activities and events, but it was also a venue that showcased high-end creative output. The art gallery offered display space to talented artists and sculptists, whilst professional performances in music, comedy, theatre and dance all regularly took place at The Courthouse. Two major youth music and arts festivals also took place at The Courthouse, which saw over 200 people attend each.

“Without the support of SoCo, this important event (EBC annual Youth Conference) would simply not happen.”

Stacey Miller, Youth Alcohol Project  
Coordinator Eastleigh Borough  
Council

“Music is great therapy. You get to learn different instruments and the teachers are very interactive with the people who come. They do a really good job of making it entertaining. It’s helped me tremendously. When I first started, I had psychosis. It’s now less. Music has helped me because it takes the stress away. It got me to go out with people and it got me socializing with other people, which has been really important. It’s helped me get back my social life. Having contact with other people who have similar issues makes you realize you’re not the only one in the boat. It’s definitely helped with my confidence. When I first started I didn’t have any confidence and wouldn’t interact with the group. But because Mark and Louis have such good personalities you can’t help getting drawn in. I went back to work last Tuesday too. It’s gradually getting me back to my normal speed.”

Adult Learning participant from Solent Mind

# ADULT LEARNING

Through SoCo's European Social Funding and Southampton City Council adult learning programmes, SoCo successfully delivered sustained creative engagement in music performance, music production, recording and film to a variety of vulnerable adult groups. These groups included adults with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities, mental health difficulties and those with substance misuse issues.

Our partner organisations were:

- WAY AHEAD DAY SERVICES
- LAUNCHPAD DAY SERVICES
- ST DENYS DAY SERVICES
- KARIBU DAY SERVICES
- PAVILION ON THE PARK DAY SERVICES
- MENCAP
- SOLENT MIND
- SOAR
- SOCIETY OF ST JAMES

Alongside this, TreeCreeper ran their 'Dreamers' theatre courses for adults with learning difficulties, Broken Physics delivered film and editing sessions to adults with substance misuse issues and The Little Art Haven delivered arts & craft sessions to adults with learning difficulties

# 141

Adult Learning Sessions

# 198

Participants engaged in regular activities



"I like singing because no matter what problems you have in life, singing takes the stress away and you feel like you're in a different world".

Young Carer's Choir participant



# YOUTH PROVISION

# 280

Creative sessions for young people

Funding from Youth Music enabled SoCo to deliver a variety of workshops for young people including Music Revolution project's free after school music clubs. In collaboration with The Sea Slugs, Jim Chorley, Amplified Guitar Tuition and Folk Active, SoCo provided weekly Rock Club, Afrobeat, Folk, Songwriting and Music Production sessions Monday to Friday at The Courthouse.

Youth Music funding also enabled SoCo to regularly engage with young carers through the Young Carers Choir and Young Carers Music Clubs. In addition to this, a monthly Rob da Bank's Music Club provided creative music workshops and performance opportunities at The Courthouse.

SoCo and Tricky Art worked in partnership with a variety of different schools and organisations to deliver workshops or courses to young offenders, young people with narcolepsy, the visually impaired and other disadvantaged groups.

# 307

Young People engaged in regular activities

Break 4 Change was a collaborative project between SoCo, TreeCreeper, Little Art Haven and Hampshire Youth Offending Team. It was a 10 week programme working with children who are violent at home and their families, providing support and creative opportunities.

Both TreeCreeper and Oddbox Productions ran free youth theatre groups at The Courthouse, The Butterfly FX ran several free Light Painting sessions and Major Minors was a weekly toddler music making session.

As part of their in kind commitments, The Sea Slugs, Little Art Haven, TreeCreeper, Artymess, The Butterfly FX, Broken Physics and Amplified Guitar Tuition, alongside SoCo, all provided free creative workshops at The Courthouse during school holidays.



"Before I came here I didn't really know what I was going to do. But now I've been writing and recording my own music, and I think that's the kind of thing I want to do in the future. It's definitely impacted my future plans. In songwriting sessions when I was collaborating and writing songs with other people, I gradually got more confident to sing in front of more and more people."

Music Club participant



“I started a knitting group at The Courthouse called Loopy Loopers which has been very successful and the women who attend socialise and support one another. The atmospheric overspill from other groups at The Courthouse adds a vibrancy to the knitting group and makes it feel like a creative community which we are all part of. Some of the women who attend are from the wider community, The Courthouse has made them aware of other events happening in Eastleigh.”

Lorna Jones, Artymess

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

Many other activities took place at The Courthouse including community lead sessions and open access creative workshops run by The Courthouse partners. These included:

- LOOPY LOOPERS: A free weekly knitting and social club run by Artymess
- SOCIAL STUDIOS: A free weekly arts practice space facilitated by Little Art Haven, Artymess and RAW Artwork
- COMEDY LAB: A free weekly session to write and perform stand-up, sketches, spoken word and musical comedy.
- HAMPSHIRE GUITAR CLUB: Weekly ‘plugged’ and ‘un-plugged’ guitar rehearsals for adults of all abilities.
- MUSIC & PLAY: Closed-door music & play therapy sessions run by Bristol based therapists Catchpoint
- WANNA SING?: Regular confidence building workshops for aspiring singers.
- ART JOURNALLING: Creative arts & crafts courses run by Little Art Haven
- MAJOR MINORS: Weekly toddler music making sessions
- THE COURTHOUSE YOUTH THEATRE: free weekly sessions run by TreeCreeper
- SUMMER JAZZ SCHOOL: Jazz ensemble for young people run by Dan Mar-Molinero
- DREAMERS: Theatre group for adults with learning difficulties run by TreeCreeper
- ARTYMESS WORKSHOPS: Textile workshops run by Artymess
- RAY'S GUITAR CLUB: Weekly sessions specialising in gypsy jazz
- SUMMER SAMBA SESSIONS: Free weekly drumming workshops run by Batala

The Courthouse was also a valuable resource for rehearsal space for a variety of performance groups and Courthouse residents from rock bands and folk orchestras to theatre and dance groups.

# 273

Open creative sessions

# 127

Participants regularly attending

# 161

Rehearsals

- ★ 3 FESTIVALS
- ★ 13 GIGS
- ★ 8 THEATRE PERFORMANCES
- ★ 18 ART EXHIBITIONS
- ★ 3 CONFERENCES
- ★ 10 TRAINING
- ★ 13 OTHER EVENTS



# EVENTS

A total of 68 events took place at The Courthouse, highlights include:

- LAUNCH EVENT: Live Music, Arts and Crafts, 300 people attended.
- THE COURTHOUSE OPEN MIC NIGHT: Monthly performance opportunities for music, comedy, theatre and spoken word.
- URBAN X: Free 1-day festival of urban music and culture.
- FESTIVAL OF INTERNATIONAL MUSIC: Free 2-day festival that included performances and workshops from around the world, over 300 people attended.
- EASTLEIGH FRINGE CARNIVAL OF COMEDY: A day of live comedy and film.
- PURGATORY: Immersive theatre production from TreeCreeper.
- LD CLUB NIGHT: Live music performances and disco for adults with learning difficulties.
- COURTHOUSE SESSIONS: 5 live music events, including performance opportunities for 12 local musicians and attended by over 150 people.
- 21 DOWN: Artwork exhibition by young artists, 40 people attended launch event.
- A DOLLS HOUSE: 3-day performance by emerging theatre company Broken Arrow. Performed to audience of 85 people.

EASTLEIGH BOROUGH COUNCIL YOUTH CONFERENCE – 80 young people and youth agency workers attended to explore mental health and well being.

- YOUNG CARERS CHRISTMAS PARTY: 150 young carers and adult carers attended to engage in festive activities along with family members
- FARHAM DAY SERVICES' CHRISTMAS PRODUCTION OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND: Adults with learning difficulties, supported by TreeCreeper. 80 people attended.
- COMIC RELIEF COMEDY LAB SHOWCASE: 40 people attended a live comedy showcase performed by members of the Courthouse Comedy Lab.
- FOLK EDUCATORS CONFERENCE: 35 folk educators from across the South of England participating in a day of training, workshops and performance organised by EFDSS
- HAMPSHIRE SCHOOL OF ENTREPRENEURS STUDY DAY: 25 social entrepreneurs from across Hampshire with training, support and networking.





“For everyone, even if they don’t attend all the time, they’ve all had an increase in confidence. Two of our service users have even seen such a big growth in confidence that they’ve gone back to work. Music helps give them this confidence because it encourages them to step out of their comfort zone by maybe picking up an instrument, which still feels quite safe. These little steps are so important because they can lead onto bigger, wider life steps. To have a hobby or an interest is really important. There can also be a massive impact on motivation. One individual who regularly comes to sessions had never engaged in any activity before. He wouldn’t even get out of bed when his support worker went round and now he will in order to attend these workshops”

Ruth Webster, Wellbeing Manager, Solent Mind

# SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Through creative courses at The Courthouse there have been numerous outcomes for vulnerable learner groups, directly impacting on participants’ lives. They have helped support participants’ rehabilitation into society by enhancing their lives socially, personally and mentally. Alongside this they also provide progression routes for further creative practice and improve educational and economic progression through raising aspirations.

Some groups and participants have experienced a large number of outcomes in a variety of areas. For other learners the outcomes are smaller, however, seemingly insignificant actions such as regular attendance to sessions or contributing towards a conversation are not to be underestimated and are often a sign of far-reaching impact.

Many participants have recognised improvements in a number of areas following involvement in creative activities, such as confidence, independence, self-expression, self-esteem and the opportunity to gain friendship. Support staff have also commented on the important role creative engagement had in enriching the lives of participants, nurturing self-esteem and encouraging participation, which in turn reduces isolation. They have observed improvements in learners’ wellbeing, inclination to integrate, sense of belonging and sense of achievement.

Participants also learnt a variety of skills that are transferrable for the workplace, such as commitment to learning, self confidence, working independently or as part of a team, leadership/teaching skills, presentation skills, reliability, punctuality and forward planning.

Sessions also enabled participants to acquire a number of hard outcomes such as instrumental skills/knowledge, musical terminology/knowledge, song/lyric writing skills, music production and recording skills, I.T skills (through various music software/equipment), improved mathematics skills, English language and writing skills (through lyrics writing sessions, which can be especially pertinent for those with English as a second language).

Many of the music making apps that are used in sessions are inexpensive and can be accessed by participants at home. We have also supported a number of participants’ music progression by acquiring instruments for them. In a number of cases, proof of development has come in their progression onto more sophisticated courses (either with SoCo or with another organisation) and even movement into volunteering or employment positions.

SoCo were able to provide several volunteer opportunities and placements for young people at The Courthouse. In partnership with Southampton City Council and Artswork, SoCo recruited 3 young people onto the Creative Traineeship Scheme and another 3 people joined the team through the Creative Internship Scheme, both of which were aimed at providing employment opportunities for unemployed young people. Also, many other volunteers supported workshops and activities, the planning and delivery of events, marketing and promotion and the general running of The Courthouse Café.

Youth Music funding enabled SoCo to provide professional development and training opportunities for creative organisations and individuals, from inclusive facilitation and masterclasses to Arts Award Advisor training.

The art gallery and Courthouse Café were open to the public and free to access during working hours and on weekends. They provided an opportunity for the local community to view high quality art in an interesting and unique venue. The café was utilised by local residents for meetings and by vulnerable groups who saw the space as a safe and supportive environment.

“It is refreshing to work with an organisation that genuinely supports and nurtures artists. Venues such as this are crucial to the artistic development of any town, and seeing the impact The Courthouse has had on Eastleigh and the surrounding area within the arts community and indeed the general public in such a short amount of time is an incredible achievement. Long may it continue.”

Claire Harvey, The River People

## ARTISTIC OUTCOMES

The Courthouse project brought many creative organisations from surrounding areas into Eastleigh and provided opportunities for the local community to access and engage in activities and events that develop their creative skills, many of which were free.

Art Journalling, theatre groups, music performance and many more open courses provided participants with new creative skills and were all readily available at The Courthouse. Peer support groups such as The Courthouse Social Studios, Loopy Loopers and Comedy Lab enabled participants to work together or individually in a supportive and nurturing space.

The Courthouse also offered many showcase opportunities for resident and local up and coming artists and groups through regular art exhibitions and events. Aspiring musicians, comedians and theatre groups were regularly rewarded with a platform to showcase their talents such as at The Courthouse's monthly Open Mic nights.

The Courthouse provided affordable office, workshop and rehearsal space and was made accessible to partners 24/7, aiding greater creative output and flexibility around work life. The affordability of the venue enabled more non-established creatives to access the facilities, aiding artistic development.

With such diverse creative talent across multiple art forms all in one building, resident artists and musicians were rewarded with endless inspiration and opportunities to discover and explore. SoCo's open and supportive attitude to performance opportunities and events meant that The Courthouse became a vibrant canvas both metaphorically and physically.



“The Courthouse has been a wonderful resource and great place to bring groups of young people to inspire them and make them feel comfortable and creative. It has been beneficial having multiple flexible spaces and having a range of practitioners based there to approach for workshops.”

Charlotte Slinger, Youth Arts Officer,  
Hampshire Cultural Trust



# CHALLENGES

SoCo faced a number of challenges when setting up and running The Courthouse as a community arts venue, none more so than the issues around staff capacity. SoCo is predominantly project funded and therefore doesn't receive funding for core staff, this meant that the majority of time spent at and working towards the development of The Courthouse and its activities, including the creation and implementation of documentation, was voluntary or in kind. Ideally, SoCo would have required funding for 2 full-time members of staff to manage the everyday running of the building, whilst also having several part-time members of staff to help run the café, art gallery, cleaning, security, volunteer management and marketing.

A lack of overall/continuous funding was a challenge, the only way to continue the momentum gained from funded activities and events was to provide unfunded activities and events. Minimal footfall, and marketing budget meant that income generation was low, and the temporary nature of the project did not allow for long term planning.

The building itself was a large challenge for several reasons; additional to the lack of funding required to refurb and maintain it, it was difficult to fully utilise the space and adapt it to our specific needs. For example, due to the lack of a lift, the upstairs was inaccessible for people with physical disabilities, and several rooms remained unused due to their condition and suitability. The temperature of the building discouraged groups and individuals attending or booking at The Courthouse, which we were unable to resolve due to the huge energy bills.

The level of security for the building was low, especially considering the value of equipment and furniture within the building. As many partner organisations required 24-hour access, we were reliant on them to ensure the alarm was set and all doors locked. However, on a number of occasions, main access doors were left unlocked and alarm devices failed to work due to age and lack of maintenance.

Regular partner meetings took place to inform partner organisations of any building news and of upcoming activities and events. They also provided opportunities to discuss ideas about the project as a whole, however, as the lead partner for The Courthouse, SoCo was required to ensure that any plans were in line with the project's vision. On occasion, the opinions of certain partner organisations differed greatly.

When managing 'in kind' contributions from partner organisations (e.g. workshops or cafe/cleaning rotas) there were varying opinions on what was an appropriate amount to be contributed and arranging suitable times for these to take place and keeping on top of them was a difficult task.

In some cases, the relatively short-term let of the building put off certain groups and individuals booking activities or events at The Courthouse as they wanted the security of knowing that there would be no last minute cancellations due to a change in the circumstances.

Towards the end of our residency at The Courthouse it became very difficult to plan any activities due to the lack of knowledge around our impending departure. Despite the momentum the space was gaining, we were unable to take any more bookings and were reluctant to commit any additional time and money on the building and activities.

“I love the people, and the atmosphere. This has helped me with the realization that I can try something new and actually get on with it. That I’m not worthless. I’ve met people that like me. I’m likeable. It reinforces that fact. It helps with depression and boredom cos I’m actually out doing stuff. It gets me out of the house. And I’ll be sad to see it leave”

Adult Learning participant from Society of St James

# LEGACY



The partnerships and collaborations that have been established over the duration of The Courthouse project will continue to be an important part of those organisations’ future. Many of these creative organisations have grown and developed hugely as a result of their involvement with The Courthouse project and some of these are looking to find new premises together to continue working collaboratively.

Some social groups that were established at the Courthouse such as Comedy Lab, Loopy Loopers, Rob da Bank’s Music Club and open mic nights will look to continue following the establishment of a new venue.

Many of the funded closed-door creative activities delivered to vulnerable young people and adult groups will continue to run, however, an alternative space will need to be found. The hundreds of service users participating in these activities have gained many important social, practical and creative skills that will aid their long-term development and play an important role in their recovery, rehabilitation back into society and/or career progression.

The Learning Disability and Mental Health steering groups created at The Courthouse will continue to advise SoCo and partner organisations in best practice and future activity planning.

# NEXT STEPS

Utilising all of the skills and experiences gained from The Courthouse project, SoCo and partner organisations would like to find a new venue as soon as possible to maintain momentum and continue the collaborative work that has been so successful.

SoCo will research the feasibility of funding a purpose built or specially adapted building to suit our needs. The location, size and suitability of the building are all vitally important in order for us to continue and further develop the services offered at The Courthouse. We now have a greater understanding of what the local needs are and the multiple services that can be provided to the local community under one roof. SoCo and partners will need to seek funding for the development and management of the next community arts space(s) with support from local authorities.

It is important for SoCo and partners to create a sustainable model for the next creative space to lessen the reliance on funding bodies longer-term. In order to achieve this, SoCo will need initial funding and support to develop a strategic model and acquire a suitable space.

