

UMBRELLA ARTS FESTIVAL

On 10th June 2017, **SoCo Music Project** delivered a 1-day arts and wellbeing event in Palmerston Park, Southampton. In partnership with local creative organisations, Umbrella Arts Festival's programme featured inspiring and informative performances and workshops in music, theatre, art, spoken word and more from local performers and workshop leaders.



"My daughter and I had a great time! If you do it again next year I'll be sure to come earlier as my only regret this year was I didn't allow enough time to see everything. Brilliant - thank you!"



Intro

SoCo Music Project successfully applied for funding through Big Lottery's 'Celebrate' funding scheme in October 2016 to run a creative wellbeing event. This event would celebrate and raise awareness of the benefits of creative intervention amongst vulnerable groups and the wider community and of organisations who support/provide this locally.

SoCo has vast experience of delivering therapeutic creative workshops to vulnerable young people and adult groups. From music production and recording for young offenders or those with learning disabilities to music performance and composition for adults with mental health issues or substance misuse issues. We have seen first hand the transformative effect music and the arts can have on peoples lives and we wanted to provide a platform on which this could be celebrated and showcased to the wider public.

SoCo was well placed to deliver such an event due to our relationship with local creative organisations and service providers, the infrastructure we own and our experience of running similar sized music festivals in Southampton. SoCoFest 2011 and 2012 were free community events that celebrated local talent and had young people at its heart.

Our Aims

SoCo's main aims for this project were to:

- 1. Promote and raise awareness** of the organisations and individuals who are supporting vulnerable groups through creative interventions locally. Enabling these partners to have an active role in the planning and delivery of the event.
- 2. Provide a platform for service users** to perform/showcase their talent as part of the artistic programme whilst also providing service users with the opportunity to support the planning and delivery of the event through a number of voluntary roles. Through this, we would ensure that there was a high level of service user involvement/representation.
- 3. Create an all-inclusive, family friendly event** for the local community that featured free workshops and performances in an accessible, central location.
- 4. Work in partnership with local creative organisations and support agencies** to create an event that catered for/met the needs of the target groups.
- 5. Provide high quality arts engagement** through utilising local creative talent.



Our Journey

Following our successful application, SoCo invited creative organisations and support agencies to the first planning meeting for an open discussion about our proposals. From this, a number of organisations/individuals expressed an interest in having an active role in the planning and development of this event. They were:

- Matt West, ARTFULSCRIBE
- Rebecca Kinge, DANGEROUS IDEAS SOUTHAMPTON
- Kate Maple, SOLENT SHOWCASE GALLERY
- Ollie Dean, ILLUSTRATOR

This collaborative approach enabled us to build on our original ideas and gave us the opportunity to create an event that was truly unique and that benefitted the whole community. Our initial, small-scale celebratory idea grew to become a significant, multi-arts event that incorporated live art installations (Solent Showcase Gallery, John Hansard Gallery and Artymess), a Talky Tent (ArtfulScribe & Dangerous Ideas), an arts market and Wellbeing Area alongside live music and theatre at SoCo's Bandstand and Main Stage.

By utilising this variety of partners and art forms, SoCo wanted to recreate the feel and scale of the successful EjectorSeat festivals that have previously taken place in the park. Alongside this we wanted to raise awareness of arts as wellbeing. This goal enabled Umbrella Arts Festival to sit comfortably within the local festival and events calendar, which included Common People, Riverfest and Southampton City Live. Whilst many of these local festivals receive high attendance, they can often be inaccessible to a large proportion of the community - especially those that are vulnerable - due to the cost, location or emphasis on one art form

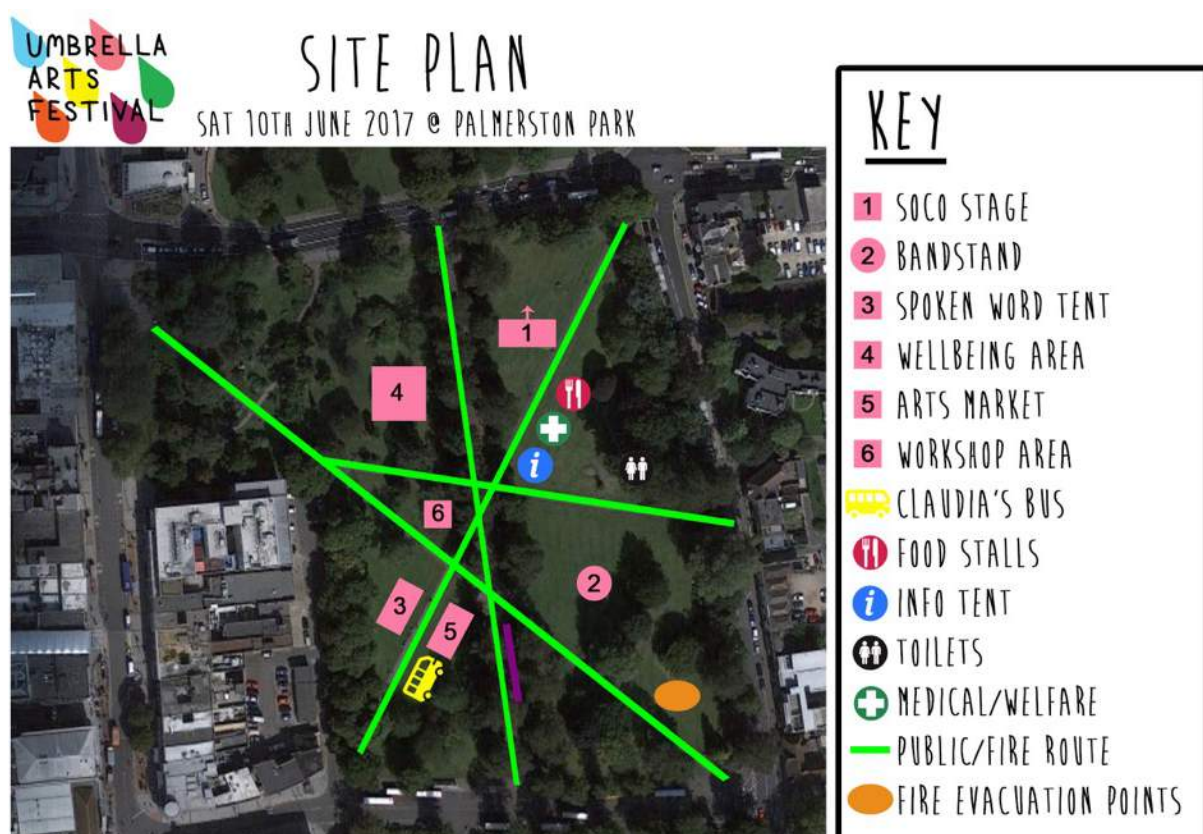
over another. Conversely, the small number of wellbeing events that take place in Southampton each year, are typically on a small scale and are unable to reach the wider community and to spread the message of wellbeing within the arts. Through Umbrella Arts Festival's USP as a multi-arts festival and principal theme of wellbeing within the arts, we wanted to create a festival that could be accessed by everyone and that would provide opportunities for the wider public to engage in and learn more about the arts and wellbeing.



The Event

SoCo's Umbrella Arts Festival was considered a huge success, creating a great sense of unity within the creative community of Southampton. A day packed full of activities for all ages, the festival worked alongside many local creative and wellness groups to achieve an event focused on improving wellbeing through the arts and increased engagement with the arts of people in the Southampton Community.

The day started off relatively quiet, however, it soon picked up as colourful decoration and the sound of live music quickly drew in a wide range of attendees of all ages and creative backgrounds, proving productive advertisement around the city leading up to the event. With the weather helping to keep spirits high, the festival created a positive and joyful atmosphere for all attending, allowing festival goers to be creative and share their feelings and views, whether this was by taking part in our many interactive workshops and activities or enjoying live music performances. This is clear from the atmosphere and high levels of engagement by all who attended.



Talky Tent

The Talky Tent, organised by **Dangerous Ideas** and **Artful Scribe**, was a bright and comfortable space of ideas, drama and discussion. It featured inspirational performances and talks throughout the day, exploring different people's experiences of the world relating to health, wellbeing and art. The audience for which were attentive and optimistic, giving so much consideration and support to the festival, performers and to Southampton. Towards the end of the day audience members began to volunteer to participate in open mic style performances to their peers, bringing a real sense of dedication and ease to the event.





"(The festival) was such a wonderful experience - I loved it. Participants' responses were heartwarming and it was lovely to see people writing away!"

- Dinos Aristidiou, the Mayflower's Writer in residence

Main Stage

Throughout the day attendees spent time moving between the two stages to enjoy the range of amazing music on offer. Showcasing performances from a host of up-and-coming local musicians, highlights at the Main Stage include unwinding to the wonderfully calming sounds of Cat Eliza T and enjoying Hip-hop Farmers who brought so much exuberance and fun to the stage towards the end of the day.



"It was great to see so much of the community come together with their families. Thank you for organizing it!"

- Attendee

The Bandstand

With a schedule that echoed the original sounds of the Victorian bandstand, choirs and a brass band featured alongside more contemporary performances including interactive theatre show, Illyria Ahoy and local hip-hop crew! Highlights include dancing along to Tuba-Libres in umbrella hats and being inspired by MERCY with their fascinating and thought provoking lyrics.



"It was great to see the park alive with loads of creative activity and colour"

- Rob Iliffe, Theatre In A Bag

Wellbeing Area

At the Wellbeing Area, there were many art activities to participate in, such as fun and playful experimental drawing workshops, decorating of umbrellas, badge making and knitting. Attendees were able to explore 'what makes a good neighbour?' and express what would make them happy by writing a 'message in a rain drop'. This area also saw the running of yoga and very giggly Aerobics with Soul classes, which helped bring a great ambience to Southampton and enabled attendees to experience new activities and support the local wellness community.



"What a fabulous day and I was thrilled to share Aerobics With Soul at the Festival. Overall it was a great day, the atmosphere, the people and all the HARD WORK put into setting it all up looked amazing, and was very much appreciated.."

- Salma Faraji, Aerobics With Soul

Art Illustrations

The festival became a walk-through art gallery, brought to life through a variety of Art Installations created by **John Hansard Gallery, Solent Showcase Gallery**, local artists, art students and festival goers on the day. Attendees could be hands on with the artwork and were kept entertained by the ongoing art activities available, decorating their own umbrellas and adding their work to the hanging umbrella installation. The bunting that lined the pathways and workshop areas were created by Solent Mind service users and **Artymess** prior to the event - adding to the sense of ownership by the target groups.



Arts & Crafts Market

With a small selection of local market and food stalls, festival-goers were able to explore and appreciate our Arts Market which offered a range of products. Unique and bespoke creations such as locally made flower essences and fudge, beautiful artwork and vintage clothing were brought to you by **Keepers Collective**, **John Hansard Gallery**, **Creative Options** and local designer-makers.



"Great fun was had by all for the Keepers Artist Collective, we had lots of interest and it was great to meet so many local people. For those of us who could attend it was great to get involved. I loved the furry animals and chilled atmosphere."

- Jacqueline Rolls

Impact

The festival was a great success, bringing together 12 different creative organisations and wellbeing providers to deliver a total of 11 workshops and 21 performances throughout the day. With a total attendance of around 2000 people, the event was well attended and much larger than the 700 or so that had interacted with the event via social media prior to the day. This can largely be explained by the proximity to the town centre and city parks, which enabled us to capture a different audience and the good weather.

Overall, audience feedback was constructive and encouraging, suggesting we have succeeded in our aim to bring people of Southampton together for a day of entertainment, engagement and positivity. We have been pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm of the festival-goers and their willingness to participate in and enjoy the events of the day. Highlights for attendees included the diverse range of performances and workshops on offer, the atmosphere and feel of the event and the collaborative nature of the event.

“Seeing the superb show about autism and learning about the flow observatorium was gamechanging for me, both in terms of how I view my neuroatypicality and how I view art as a way of communicating about it - a very valuable experience.”

- Carrie, performer

Service user involvement

In the lead-up to the event, **Artymess** delivered a number of textile workshops for Solent Mind service users which culminated in the bunting used to decorate the site.

Recovery All Stars opened up our Main Stage and is a group that developed through the partnership between SoCo Music Project and Society of St James' 'Recovery Group'. This group supports the rehabilitation and recovery of adults with substance misuse issues through engagement in music. The group meets regularly and began performing together last summer.

Opening up the Bandstand was a service user from Solent Mind who has been involved in SoCo's Adult Learning Programme for a number of years. This was followed by another service provider group, **With a Song in Mind**, which started life as an 'add-on' feature of the Creative Options Drop In and whose singers have lived experience in mental health.

Creative Options also provided a stall at the arts market, selling crafts and displaying artwork created by their service users as part of their programme of engagement for people with mental health issues.

Throughout the day the SoCo team were supported by our incredible volunteer team made up of service users from Solent Mind, Society of St James and Solent University. Through roles such as stage support, flyering/marketing, manning the info stall and supporting the setup and pack down of the site, SoCo were able to provide a number of individuals with valuable work experience.

Challenges

Although the festival was largely a success, SoCo did face a number of challenges along the way. From the planning through to the delivery of this project, there are several ways in which our efficiency and effectiveness could be improved. The main issues encountered were:

- **Volunteer recruitment** for the festival was much lower than expected. Far fewer service users and service providers were able to commit to supporting SoCo on the day and call-outs to the general public through social media received little to no response.
- **Volunteer commitment** was unpredictable, with many unable to commit to the full day, especially those recruited through service providers due to their own ongoing issues.
- **Changes to the schedule** through last-minute drop-outs of performers. This affected timings on both the Main Stage and Bandstand. Solent Mind also dropped out of their workshop delivery which weakened the festival's overall links to wellbeing.
- **Accessibility** was an issue for some service users who were based outside of Southampton as they were either not confident of travelling to Southampton or of being around large crowds.
- **Budget allocation** was difficult to anticipate prior to the event due to the change in scale of the festival. This needed to be adjusted, with a much larger proportion required for marketing and on logistics.
- **Timescale** - having been awarded Celebrate funding in late 2016 and with other work commitments already underway, SoCo did not have the capacity to begin this project until 6 months before the festival date. The result of this was that a number of performers/food vendors etc. had already been booked for other events.

What's Next?

The festival was a huge success, raising interest of and awareness in the arts and wellbeing in Southampton by bringing together a large number of local creatives. SoCo would love to continue this success by seeking funding/sponsorship to deliver Umbrella Arts Festival 2018!



With Thanks To...

Matt West - ARTFULSCRIBE

Rebecca Kinge - DANGEROUS IDEAS SOUTHAMPTON

Kate Maple, Joe Ross and team - SOLENT SHOWCASE GALLERY

Val Drayton - JOHN HANSARD GALLERY

Lorna - ARTYMESS

Zara Tatum and Imogen TatumWyatt — LITTLE ART HAVEN

Alex Batten and team - K6 GALLERY

Frances Heather and team - CREATIVE OPTIONS

Claudia Murg - WE MAKE SOUTHAMPTON

Ollie Dean - ILLUSTRATOR

Jacquie Rolls and team - KEEPERS COLLECTIVE

Emma & Craig - BROKEN PHYSICS

local designer makers at the arts market

SoCo's team of volunteers

& all of the amazing performers and workshop leaders

