

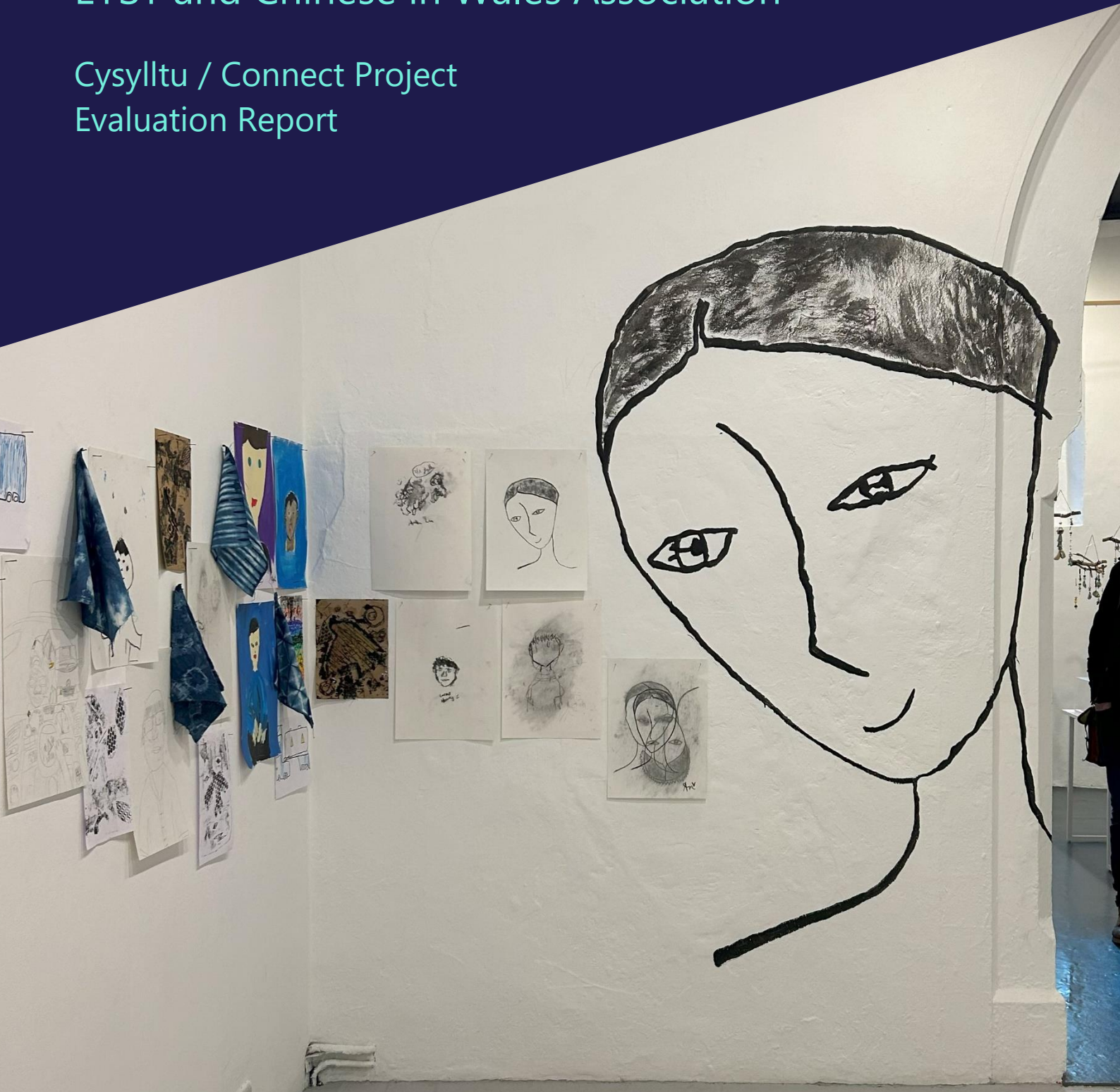
# ewmpas

For economic and social change

Mission Gallery

EYST and Chinese in Wales Association

Cysylltu / Connect Project  
Evaluation Report





Mission  
Gallery

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Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru  
Arts Council of Wales

Cwmpas would like to thank the people who took part in this evaluation for sharing their experiences with us. We would also like to thank the teams at the Chinese in Wales Association, EYST and Mission Gallery for giving their time, expertise and for their sharing many of the photos used in this report.

## 1. Overview and Aims

The project was a collaboration between Mission Gallery, the Chinese in Wales Association (CIWA) and EYST (the Ethnic Youth Support Team).

Mission Gallery identified through their previous work with EYST, CIWA and other third sector organisations, that there can be many barriers to accessing art and creativity for people from marginalised communities. Mission Gallery was granted funding through the Arts Council of Wales's 'Create' funding to work with CIWA's Autism Support and youth services and EYST's Asylum Rights project to,

*"...address these barriers by delivering quality artist-led workshops programmed with CIWA and EYST...Cysylltu/Connect will celebrate the transformative power of art on the lives of young people and asylum seekers and also address historical inaccessibility of cultural spaces."*<sup>1</sup>

The project aimed to achieve these aims through delivering three distinct series of workshops – for the EYST Asylum Rights group, the CIWA autism support groups for young autistic people and parent/carers of autistic people, and CIWA youth group. Mission Gallery worked with each organisation to co-produce the workshops, identifying creative activities that interested and appealed to each group and recruiting artists that would be able to meet the needs of each cohort.

[Mission Gallery](#) is an art gallery in Swansea with a mission to, *"...collaboratively develop and deliver an innovative programme that is inclusive and distinctively of Wales; to be practitioner focused, artistically ambitious and to enrich the lives of all involved."*<sup>2</sup> The "Cysylltu/ Connect" project utilises learning from previous projects and develops partnerships formed with EYST and CIWA.

The [Chinese in Wales Association](#), *"...is a charitable organisation which aims to deliver services that will make a positive difference to the lives of ethnic Chinese residents in Wales."*<sup>3</sup> One of CIWA's core services is to support and advocate for the well-being of people with autism. Within the Chinese community, *"...stigma and stereotypes towards Autism have become one of the most significant challenges that Chinese families with children diagnosed with Autism have to face within the Chinese cultural context."*<sup>4</sup> CIWA'S Autism Support services aim to promote understanding, reduce stigma and support and enhance the well-being of autistic people and their families.

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<sup>1</sup> Original 'Create' fund bid text

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.missiongallery.co.uk/about/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://chineseinwales.org.uk/about-us/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://chineseinwales.org.uk/project/autism-support/>

[EYST](#) is a third sector organisation and their aim is, *"...to provide ethnic minority people with the opportunity to reach their fullest potential through holistic, targeted, and culturally sensitive programmes covering education, employment, health, community safety and cohesion."*<sup>5</sup>

The project is funded through the Arts Council of Wales's "Create" fund, which aims to support more inclusion and diversity in the arts and is closely aligned with the [Well-being of Future Generations Act \(Wales\) 2015](#).

The purpose of the fund is described below;

*"This programme area will help us to meet our priorities around equalities, diversity, the Welsh language, nurturing creative talent and supporting sector resilience. "Create" continues our commitment to the principles of the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, ensuring that our public funding has a cultural and social purpose."*<sup>6</sup>

Cwmpas were engaged by Mission Gallery to provide a formative evaluation of the project.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.eyst.org.uk/about-us>

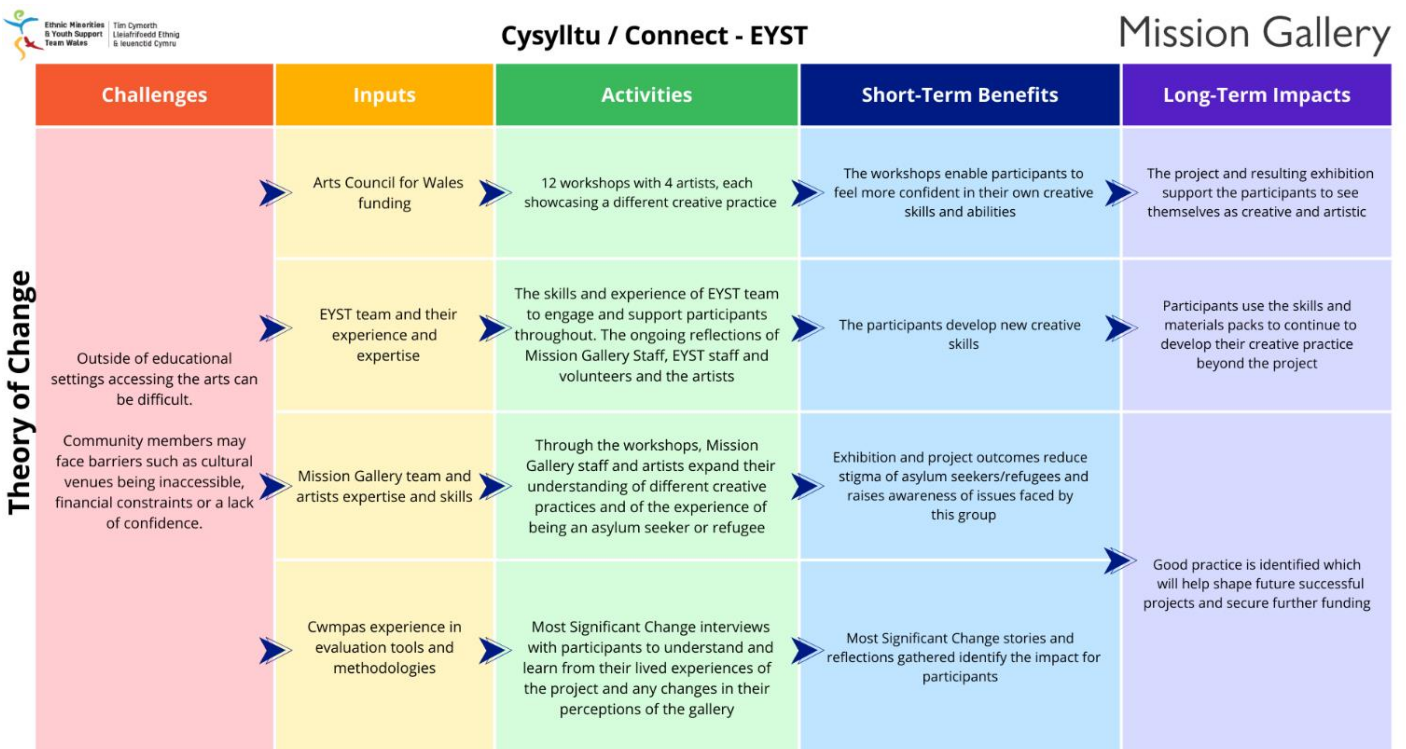
<sup>6</sup> <https://arts.wales/funding/create>

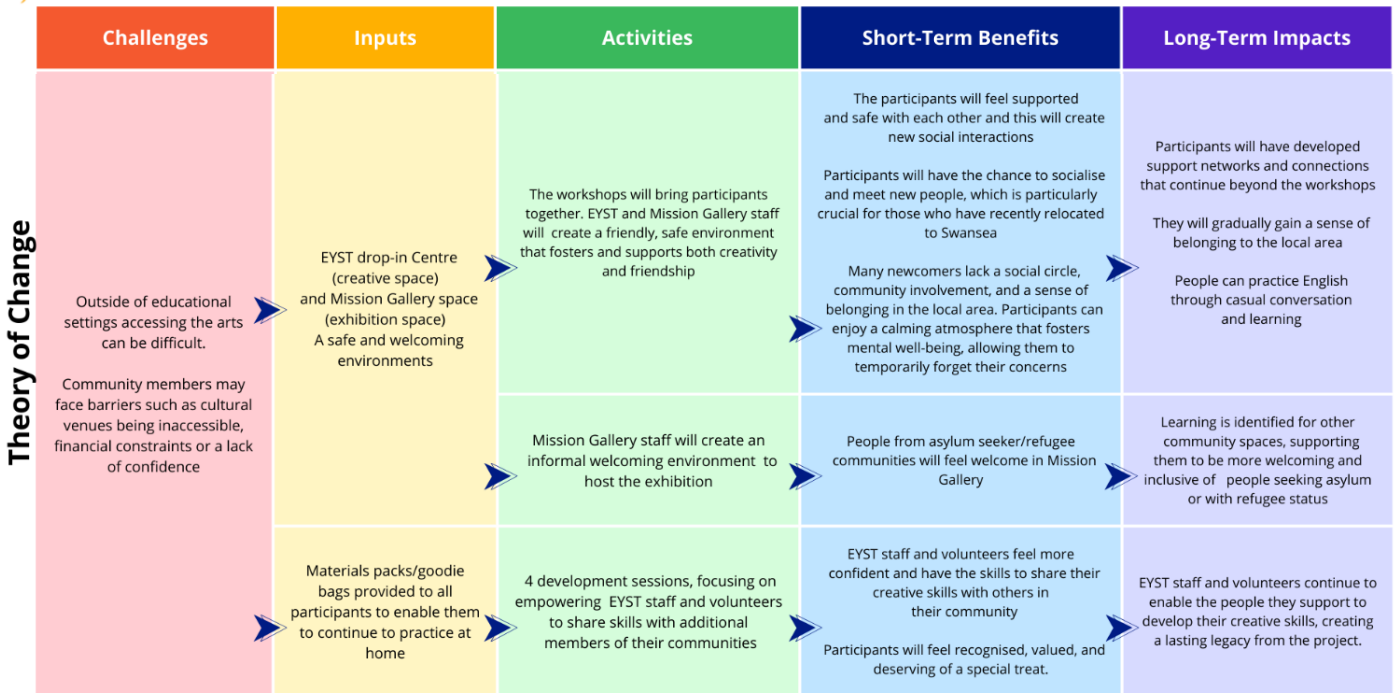
## 2. Theories of Change

In order to ensure that the project activities resulted in the intended aims and outcomes of the project, Cwmpas collaborated with Mission Gallery, EYST and CIWA to create a theory of change for each partner organisation. This helped to ensure that the individual differences and needs of each group were fully considered and respected. A separate theory of change also allowed for a slightly different approach to be crafted for each client group and allowed for different short and long-term outcomes to be agreed for each group, based on these identified needs.

Each Theory of Change established how the project activities would directly result in the outcomes and impacts that the project had set out to achieve. This approach gave the project clarity, developed a shared understanding between the partners and provided a roadmap for the project as it progressed.

### EYST Theory of Change



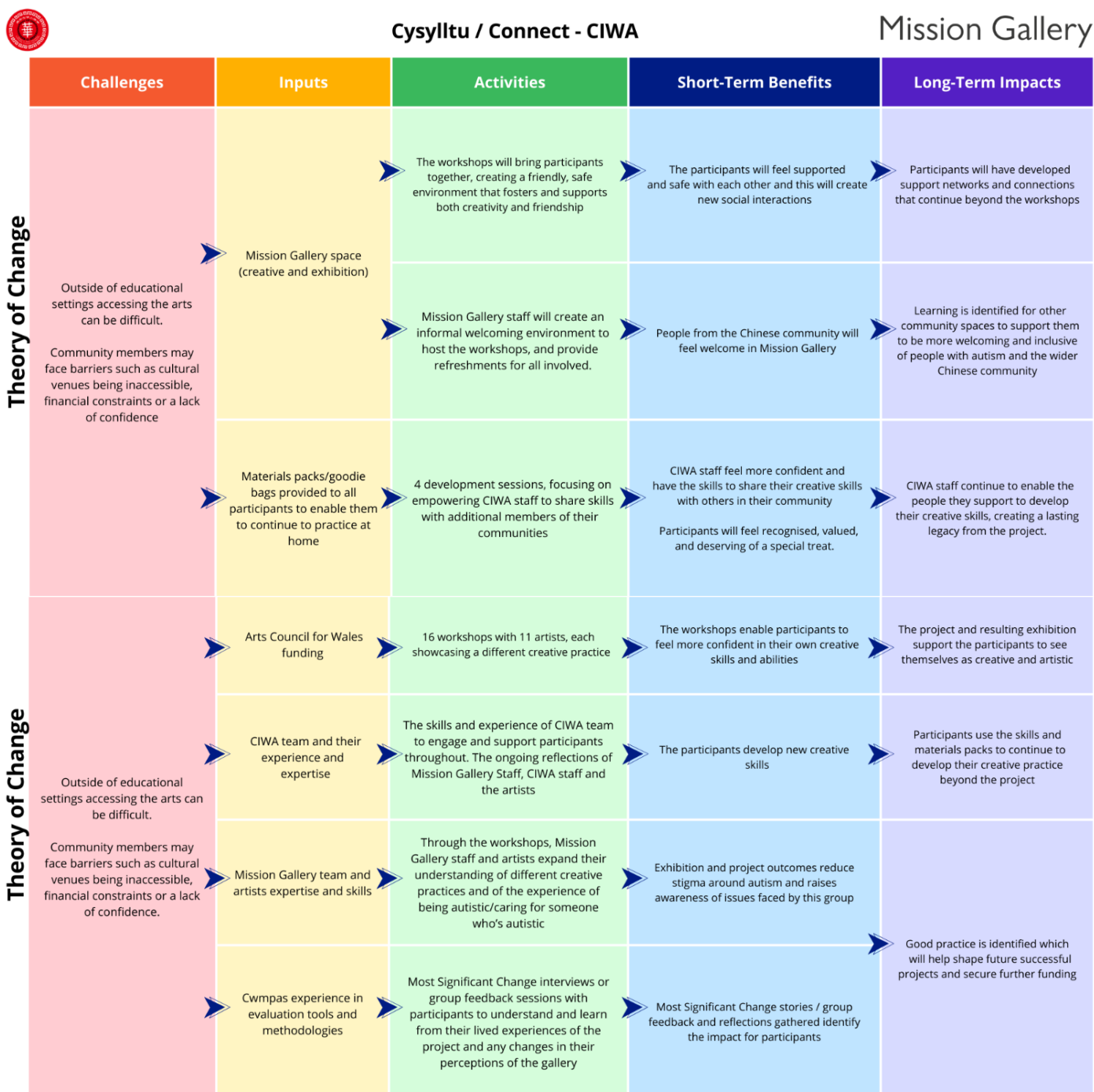


EYST, Mission Gallery and Cwmpas also worked together to consider what challenges and barriers that might prevent the project from achieving the aims and outcomes within the Theory of Change.

Risk, Barriers, Enablers	
Disengagement from service users	People often have many other commitments and busy lives and may not be able to attend more than one session. This can make it difficult to track the impact of the project for participants.
Poor mental health	If people suffer from poor mental health, they may not feel the need to go out of the house to do some art. We will need active one to one promotion prior to the events.
Financial constraints	Bus fares could be a barrier so we would need to promote actively that bus tickets will be refunded.
Language barrier	Lack of confidence, fear to be mixing with people from different background and language. Promotion should be done by their support workers, i.e. an EYST member of staff that people trust.
Cultural gap	Some people may never have been to any art group because it is not common in their area of origin, so we need to convince them to "give it a go"

Each of these barriers and risks were discussed and we drew upon the expertise of the EYST team to implement plans to mitigate the risks identified. The Asylum and Refugee Support Worker and the Volunteer Coordinator from EYST provided support to publicise the workshops and encourage attendance. Mission Gallery used the funding to ensure that all participants were provided with refunds for any transport costs they incurred travelling to attend workshops. At every workshop, there were members of EYST staff and volunteers on hand to provide additional emotional, practical and language support. EYST also provided volunteers to help care for small children attending workshops to allow the adults to fully engage in the sessions.

### Chinese in Wales Association Theory of Change



Again, Mission Gallery, CIWA and Cwmpas worked together to explore the possible challenges and risks and collaboratively identified ways to mitigate these challenges.

Risk, Barriers, Enablers	
Disengagement from service users	<p>People often have many other commitments and busy lives and may not be able to attend more than one session. This can make it difficult to track the impact of the project for participants.</p>
Gathering feedback from children and young people may be more difficult	<p>The project involves children and young people, some of whom will be autistic.</p> <p>It may be more difficult to gather stories and feedback as they may not want to/be able to share their experiences.</p> <p>The project team (Mission Gallery, Cwmpas, CIWA, the artists) will work together to explore ways to enable the participants to express their thoughts and feelings in a way that is meaningful and appropriate for them.</p>

The Project Manager and Family Engagement Officer from CIWA provided expert insights into the needs of the parents and particularly the young autistic people that would be taking part in the workshops. The CIWA team agreed to publicise the workshops, to support and encourage attendance. It was agreed for Cwmpas to observe the workshops and to interview the parents, carers and young people in a way that felt comfortable for them.



### 3. The Workshops

The project was designed around the delivery of workshops led by professional artists that specialise in different media and techniques. There were 29 workshops held across the project. The average attendance was 13 people, with many people coming to sessions every week. In total, the project achieved 400 attendances at the workshops, as well as providing additional staff development sessions attended by 23 members of EYST staff and volunteers. The project was also able to support 1:1 sessions for some of the children from the CIWA youth projects.

The EYST workshops all took place at the organisation's Sanctuary Hub in the centre of Swansea. The location was decided collaboratively and early in the project design phase, with Mission Gallery listening to the experienced EYST team who felt it was very important to successful engagement that the workshops took place somewhere that the participants felt was familiar and comfortable. There were a total of 12 workshops at the Sanctuary Hub, with an additional two sessions for staff and volunteers. Each artist led three sessions each, guiding participants through the techniques, supporting their use of various media and tools, and supporting and enabling their creative choices. Attendees from EYST were supported with travel costs and childcare was provided on site by EYST volunteers.

The Chinese in Wales Association workshops all took place in Mission Gallery. Each workshop took place in the private space upstairs or at a time when the gallery was closed to the public. The CIWA sessions worked with three distinct groups – a parent carer group, a youth group which was a mix neurodiverse and neurotypical young people between the ages of 10 and 16 and a group for younger autistic children aged between the ages of 4 and 10.

Cwmpas were able to attend a number of the workshops throughout the project and each one that we attend was relaxed, welcoming and inclusive with plenty of time for both quiet creativity and social connection. The workshops always had free tea, coffee, juice, biscuits and snacks which helped each group settle in and feel welcome in the space. The artists were skilled at instructing the participants in getting to grips with a new artistic technique, and were supportive and helpful throughout the sessions.

The project engaged 12 different professional artists with a vast range of skills and experience to lead the workshops. [Tomos Sparnon](#) worked with the CIWA young people to explore painting and [Osian Grifford](#) engaged them in Character Design. [Amy Trehan](#) led a workshop on lino printing, [Sara Holden](#) engaged the CIWA young people in textiles. [Lucy Donald](#) led the CIWA young people in animation workshop, [Carole King](#) in bookbinding. [Lisa Burkl](#) and [Alison Warren](#) engaged with both CIWA and EYST in glass and ceramics workshops respectively. [Armağan and Nese Aydin](#) supported both organisations to engage in creating mosaics, [Bronwen Gwillim](#) led workshops repurposing plastic and [Lee John Phillips](#) worked with both organisations to explore wood carving. [Bill Taylor-Beales](#) also provided some 1:1 sessions for the CIWA young people on clay sculpture. We will explore some of the workshops in more detail below.

## Glass

Lisa Burkl is a Swansea based artist, specialising in glass. Her work is inspired by symbolism, iconography, colour, light, reflection and projection and she is experienced in working with groups who have experienced trauma, such individuals who have experienced homelessness and sexual violence.

Lisa worked with the CIWA youth groups and the EYST group, providing four workshops where she supported the participants to create beautiful glass panels using markers, gold leaf and other simple but effective techniques.



We observed one of the workshops for the CIWA Youth Group. Initially the young people seemed very quiet and reluctant to participate. One young person was quite distressed and tearful, but felt able to sit at the table with everyone. Lisa created a calm, warm, safe space and gently supported the young people to use glass photoframes, markers and gold leaf to create colourful outlines of their own hands. Gradually the young people became engaged and very focused on their creativity. As the session progressed, the young people began to talk with each other, ask questions and seek assurance from Lisa. Lisa was patient and reassuring, engaging the group very gently in discussions about hands and what they symbolised. The young people all created unique designs, and by the end of the session they were proudly showing each other their creations. The young people appeared more relaxed, happier and more communicative by the end of the workshop. The young person who had been upset had created a beautiful glass outline of their hand and left the session smiling and proud of the artwork they had created.

Lisa reflected that she had felt it was a privilege to be part of the project and that she had learned a great deal from all of the participants. The photos below show the finished glass works, displayed at the exhibition in Mission Gallery. The glass images of hands were created by the CIWA Youth Group, each one a unique expression of the young person's individuality. The individual glass squares created by the EYST participants were combined by Lisa into a single panel, representing the connections created through the project.



## Mosaic

Armağan and Nese Aydin are mosaic artists from Turkey, based in Swansea. They came to Swansea seeking asylum and they are human rights activists supporting freedom of expression and supporting communities.<sup>7</sup> Armağan and Nese worked with the participants from both organisations to create mosaics using pieces of broken tiles. Each group were supported and encouraged to create images and designs that were meaningful for them.



<sup>7</sup> <https://cov19chronicles.com/good-morning-summer/>

We observed one of the workshops at the Sanctuary Hub with EYST. There were a range of participants from different countries including Ukraine, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Many of the participants had attended a previous mosaic session and were continuing to work on creating pieces that they had already started in previous weeks. The new participants were supported by Armağan to safely use tools to cut and nibble the tile pieces into the shapes they wanted for their design. Participants were very focused but the atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, with people coming and going throughout. There was an EYST volunteer present who cared for any young children who came with their parents to the session, enabling the adults to full participate in and enjoy the creative activity.

There were a family of Ukrainian refugees attending some of the EYST workshops and movingly, the three children in the family independently created a series of mosaic with elements and colours from the Ukrainian flag.



## Repurposed Plastic

Bronwen Gwillim is an artist that makes art and jewellery from waste plastic, much of which she collects from the beaches where she lives in Pembrokeshire. We were able to observe a workshop with the young people from CIWA, which was a very busy and lively session. The young people were all excited to get involved, and were particularly fascinated with Bronwen's large plastic melting press. Some of the young people at the workshop were non-verbal and some had significant care needs. The artist and the staff from Mission Gallery were able to successfully and meaningfully engage this large group of children and adults, supporting everyone to create something beautiful from the scraps of waste plastic. Many of the children wanted to show us their creations and were excited by how the plastic melting machine transformed the waste materials into beautiful brooches and badges.



Bronwen introduced a range of different activities into the session, keeping everyone engaged and interested. The children seemed to really enjoy how the melted plastic took on different shapes and patterns, and revelled in the unexpected results that came out of the heat press. The children all created a number of beautiful badges, necklaces, bracelets and brooches and seemed to glow with pride when their parents and friends told them how beautiful their creations were or how skilfully they had made their jewellery.

## Ceramics

The project engaged two artists specialising in ceramics to lead different sessions for EYST and CIWA. Alison Warren works in a range of different media, specialising in ceramics, mould-making and kiln fusing and she led workshops with the CIWA young people and the parent carers.



The young people created beautiful ceramic hanging decorations which contained brightly coloured beads, ceramic sea creatures and shapes embossed into clay. The exhibition displayed these beautiful creations, hanging them from the high vaulted ceiling in the main gallery, allowing them to catch the light from the windows.

Lowri Davies works in bone china and porcelain specialising in decorating ceramics with ink and watercolour drawings and led workshops for the EYST participants.



In some of the EYST workshops, Lowri worked with the participants to use transfers to decorate mugs and tiles. Many of the designs were Lowri's own illustrations and the participants were able to cut these up, combining and overlaying them to create their own designs.



We were able to observe one of Lowri's ceramic workshops at the EYST Sanctuary Hub. There was a large group of participants in attendance. There were two families that had brought their homeschooled children to take part in the workshop as well as a number of people with small children and others who had come on their own. The workshops was relaxed and welcoming to everyone who came in and there was a volunteer on hand to care for small children. The participants created a huge range of different artworks, from small intricate bowls to large decorative pieces.

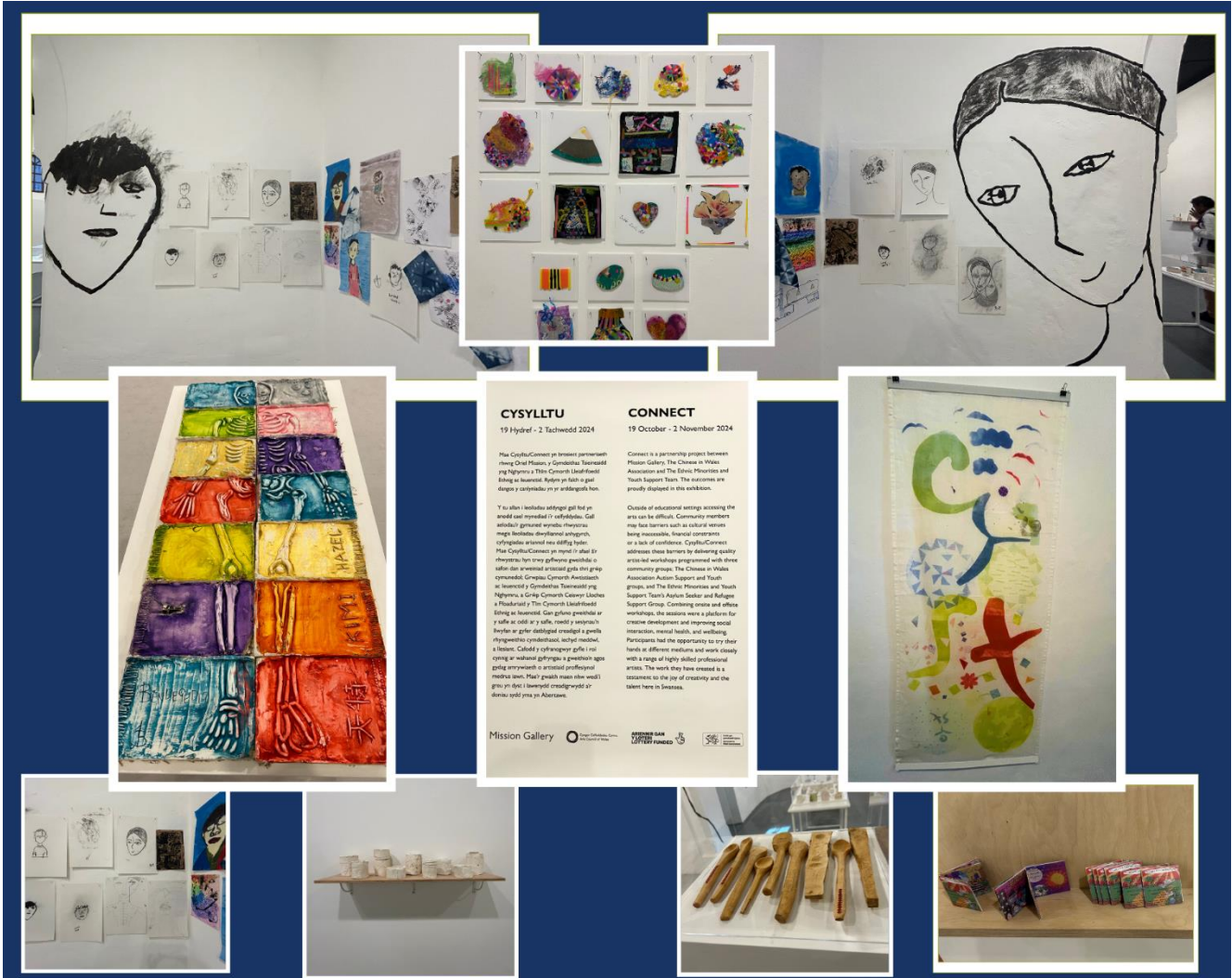


Most of the participants had never tried ceramics before and surprised themselves by how "professional" their art looked by the end of the session. Lowri supported people to get to grips with basic techniques as well as troubleshooting problems as they arose, suggesting ways to achieve the desired finishes and helping people to stabilise and mend collapsing creations.

The participants talked freely, sharing tips and commiserating with each other when their designs didn't go according to plan. Lowri, the EYST and Mission Gallery staff created a welcoming, safe, inclusive session where people were encouraged to be adventurous in their designs and to try using the clay to express themselves in whatever way they wanted. We could see how proud and satisfied the participants were with their finished artworks at the end of the session. There was a strong sense of community in the session, with the participants providing support and encouragement for each other throughout.

## Exhibition

Between 19 October and 2 November 2024, the project culminated in an exhibition entitled, [‘Cysylltu/Connect’](#). The artwork created throughout the project was displayed in the main gallery space and described as, *“Combining onsite and offsite workshops, the sessions were a platform for creative development and improving social interaction, mental health, and well-being ...The work they have created is a testament to the joy of creativity and the talent here in Swansea.”*<sup>8</sup> The exhibition was open to the public as well as the people that attended the sessions, and photos of the exhibition can be seen below.



Lisa Burkl attended the exhibition and was very moved by the range of skills and creative talents on display. She told us,

“It’s wonderful. Everyone involved should be very proud”

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.missiongallery.co.uk/exhibitions/connect/>

We attended the exhibition and were able to observe some of the project participants seeing their artwork displayed in the gallery space. One small boy came into the exhibition and was overjoyed to see his drawings of buses on the gallery walls. The boy shouted excitedly and proudly pointed to his artworks, showing his family.



Other participants could be seen looking for their own and their friends art amongst the displays, smiling and taking photos when they located something that they had made.

It was identified through discussions between the project partners that some of the EYST participants might not feel comfortable to attend the gallery space. Mission Gallery's Outreach Manager created time for the EYST participants to come to the gallery, providing food and covering transport costs to enable the EYST participants to see their work displayed in the gallery. A few of the people that had attended the EYST workshops attended this additional event at the gallery, and it was unclear why some had chosen not to come along. It is possible that some felt some nervousness in coming to the gallery, or there might be other time or financial barriers (although transport costs were offered to those that came). However the event was very well attended by other people using EYST's services who had not been to the gallery before, but who felt welcome in the space and enjoyed the exhibition.

The Asylum and Refugee Support Worker from EYST reflected to us that the care, respect and consideration that Mission Gallery had given to the EYST participants throughout the project was "amazing".

## 4. Impact

We interviewed as many of the participants from both CIWA and EYST as possible to get a sense of the impact of the project on them and their sense of connection. CIWA also gathered feedback from the young people attending sessions, which we have also summarised below.

### 4.1 Chinese in Wales Association

#### Mei

Mei is a carer for her son who has autism. He is 9 years old and was diagnosed around the age of 2. Mei describes feeling really low and depressed at times and feeling that she *"has so much to do"* for her family, husband, children and home which means she has very little time for herself. The art sessions gave Mei some time that was just hers. Mei described feeling as if all the worry and stress leaves her when she is able to focus on something creative.

Mei told us that she sometimes lacks confidence in herself and in her own creative abilities. However, through the support provided by the artists, watching and learning from them and from the other carers, Mei feels more confident that she can create beautiful things and that she is a creative person. Mei reflected that the Mission Gallery sessions made it feel safe to try things and to not worry about getting it wrong.

I feel stressed, it is good to have something to do

Mei felt safe at Mission Gallery, she felt welcome and at home. She came to a lot of the sessions and enjoyed being able to focus on something which made all the stresses and worries disappear for a few hours. Mei feels proud of the art that she has made and her creative confidence has grown.

#### Yen-Yen

Yen-Yen has a daughter who is nearly 16 who is autistic. Yen-Yen's daughter was not diagnosed for a long time and this led to many frustrations and difficulties for Yen-Yen and her family. Yen-Yen spoke of many challenges with the process of getting an autism diagnosis. Yen-Yen had to fight to get her daughter the help and support that she needs, which caused her a great deal of suffering, stress and frustration.

Yen-Yen likes art and being creative, but never had the time at home. When she is being creative, Yen-Yen feels all her anger and frustration with the challenges she and her family face, go away for a few hours. She really values having time for her, which she doesn't otherwise get. She doesn't have time for hobbies and appreciates, *"time to be myself"* which she has been able to have at Mission Gallery. She added;

coming to here is a way of helping me to relieve stress

Yen-Yen's daughter has also come to some of the sessions at Mission Gallery. She enjoyed being creative with other kids who also have autism. She explained that her daughter liked how relaxed it was, how she could be herself and also be independent and do something without her mum there. Yen-Yen reflected that carers really need a break because they have a lot of frustrations and stresses.

### Ling

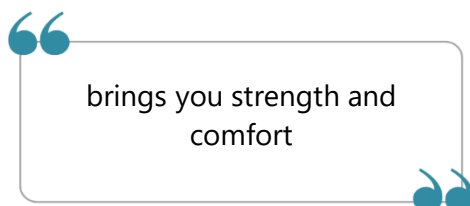
Ling has a son who is 10 and was diagnosed recently with autism. Ling reflected that she was in denial about her son's autism for a long time, and both her and her husband rejected help because they did not want to accept his diagnosis.

Ling found the art sessions at Mission Gallery really enjoyable. She really appreciated having time for herself and being able to forget about the challenges and worries in her life for a few hours. Ling feels the sessions have been good for her and good for her family. She feels less isolated after attending the workshops and she needs time just for her where she can relax and be herself.

### Kaiyun

Kaiyun has a 9 year old son who was diagnosed with autism when he was around 3 years old. Her son was non-verbal until he was about 4 or 5 years old, but now "*chats non-stop*".

For Kaiyun, being part of the Mission Gallery workshops has been a positive experience. She describes feeling "*happy to join and meet people*" and that coming to the workshops at the Gallery;



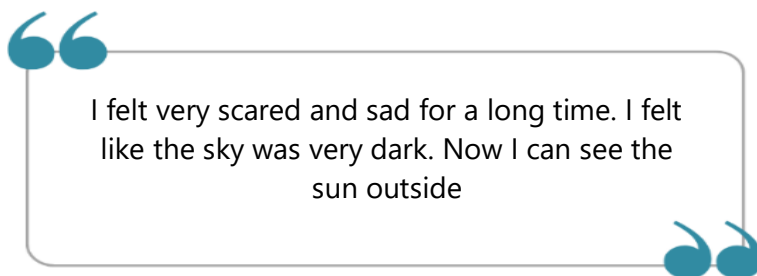
brings you strength and  
comfort

Kaiyun really valued the chance to try new activities in the workshops and to have a go and see what she could create. She explained that in China, the education system was very focused on the child listening and absorbing knowledge from the teachers and there was not a lot of room for creativity or individuality. Kaiyun likes being able to learn in a less rigid environment, being able to do her own thing and make her own individual creative decisions. This was fun for her.

Kaiyun's son came to the art sessions with the CIWA Youth Group and "*loved it*". Kaiyun explains that her son is creative and he enjoyed having time to create and learn new skills. For Kaiyun, it was important that he was in a safe space, and she felt confident to leave him at Mission Gallery. She wants her son "*to know who he truly is*", to know there is nothing wrong with him and to understand and that he is special. She wants to be the best possible parent for her son.

## Zhen

Zhen has a 14 year old son who is autistic and was diagnosed when he was 2 years old. Zhen reflected on how scared and lonely she felt before joining the Parent Carers club;



Zhen feels more positive now, after receiving help from the parent carers group and CIWA. She tells us about "*my beautiful life*." Zhen feels less isolated when she can be with the other carers. They are all getting through the challenges with each other's support.

Zhen's son also came to the Youth Group sessions at Mission Gallery. He now tells everyone "*I am an artist*." She explains that the sessions helped them both. Her son really likes being with other kids like him and it helps him feel he is not alone and not the only one who is different.

## Shaomei

We spoke with Shaomei through a translator. Shaomei explained that she has three children, all school aged who each have autism. They each need quite significant support needs, have language delay and sensory issues. Shaomei explained that she finds it very hard to find activities where her children can take part. She finds it really "*stressful and awkward*" as people don't understand why her children act the way they do, and assume they are badly behaved and judge her parenting. Shaomei felt more relaxed in the sessions in Mission Gallery as she knew her children would be included and accepted.

Shaomei reflected that before joining the CIWA parent carer group she felt life was "*a complete mess*". All of her children needed a lot of her time and support, and she felt lost and had "*no idea what to do*" to help them. Through information and support she has been able to access via CIWA, she now feels she has more understanding of autism, and how her children need to be supported.

Shaomei described how in her culture autism is "*taboo*" and how it was hard at first to understand. She explained that she was struggling with her mental health. Shaomei reflected that she used to be so isolated like "*a small island*". She believes that being able to take part in activities, like the workshops at Mission Gallery are so important for people like her. She fears that without such spaces to connect, people like her will have to "*live in pain and anxiety every day*" as she was.

Shaomei felt that the art sessions in Mission Gallery were really relaxed and she very much appreciated having time for herself. The sessions helped her well-being improve and she felt calm. Shaomei really enjoyed learning new skills and being creative. She enjoys growing and learning and she explained that this time helped her to feel less anxious and less isolated.

Shaomei felt that Mission Gallery was a wonderful space and she was very impressed. She felt the sessions were very well organised and everyone felt very relaxed and open to learning new things. Her children also loved the sessions. They had a great time and "*were very happy and relaxed, although the parent carers were not as relaxed as in their own sessions!*"

The attendees from the CIWA Youth Group were asked by CIWA to give feedback for the workshops via an online survey.

The average score for the workshops was 4.1 out of a possible 5, indicating that the workshops were very popular and well received with the young people.

When asked, what they enjoyed, the young people said;

“ All of it ”

“ Drawing the characters ”

“ Drawing the lines on the hand ”

“ Drawing the patterns on the glass thingy ”

“ Stamping the flowers in ”

“ Mixing the plaster ”

“ I liked the bit where we expanded on our characters ”

“ Everything ”

“ Practicing for the painting ”

“ Putting the gold flakes on ”

“ Making the story thing part thingy ”

“ Making the clay ”

The young people also reflected on what they had learned;

“  
I learnt everything  
”

“  
I have learnt to get  
my ideas down faster  
”

“  
How to draw my  
clothes  
”

“  
How to draw  
yourself using a  
pencil  
”

“  
I have explored  
my creativity  
”

“  
I learnt how to make  
plant pots  
”

“  
When you want your  
imagination to work, it  
goes blank  
”

“  
Drawing people using  
shape and drawing  
with a timer  
”

“  
How to be more  
creative  
”



## 4.2 EYST

We have not used the names of the EYST participants. Some were extremely anxious when speaking with us about the possibility of being identified in the report and that this made them feel unsafe.

### R

R is from Sri Lanka, she has only been in Swansea since May this year (about 4 months). She moved with her husband and daughter who is autistic. R is a carer for her daughter who requires a lot of support. R had been in Saudi before and then Bristol. In Bristol they had to all live on one hotel room, which they found hard as their daughter finds it hard to sleep. They found Bristol very busy and preferred Swansea's more relaxed and quiet feel. They have a house now, and their daughter, who has struggled with sleep all her life, is sleeping much better which has been a huge relief for R.

In Sri Lanka, R felt uncomfortable as a Muslim, wearing a hijab. She explained that she rarely went out as she *"didn't like people looking at me"*. In Saudi it was very hot and R found it *"not very free"*, particularly for women. She spent a lot of time at home with her daughter as it was so hot. There was a lot of trauma for R in leaving her country and being in a new place.

R is enjoying Swansea so far, and has found it *"really friendly"*. This session was R's first time at an EYST activity, and she had got the bus on her own for the first time. She found it ok, and was really happy to be doing something on her own and that was just for her. She has been having a lot from support from EYST since she arrived, and explained that they had been *"so so helpful and so sweet"*. She was having an English test, and hoped to be able to do a College course once her daughter was settled in a local school.

R enjoyed the mosaic workshop. She hadn't done anything like it before. She was hesitant and first, but her confidence grew and she created a beautiful geometric multi-coloured square coaster. R told me that in the past, before marriage and children, she had been really creative and loved art. R also came to some of the plastics sessions. She reflected that she loved the peace of the sessions, the relaxed atmosphere and the chance to meet new people as she knows very few people in Swansea.

R realises that she doesn't prioritise her own needs. She often doesn't eat because she is so focused on the well-being of her family and caring for her daughter. For R it was a huge thing to leave her daughter at home. She felt fearful but the sessions were so warm and welcoming, so relaxed. She was able to enjoy time for herself, where she only had to think about herself and her creativity. R was able to make new friends and contacts through the sessions;

“  
It was relaxed. I didn't think about anything but art and friends  
”

R would recommend the workshops to anyone. She feels that when someone has been through a traumatic experience, creativity can really help. It helps to feel able to express yourself, to take time to focus on a task and not think about everything.

She said, *"I love Swansea. I LOVE Swansea!"* pressing her hands to her heart. EYST have been so helpful and have enabled R to get help, advice, support and to make connections with people who she knows will help her if she needs them.

**J**  
J is from Afghanistan. She fled with her daughter who is 12 in 2019. Her husband, who originally fled with her, was a diplomat and she set up a school – mainly for girls who were not able to access education, but also for some boys who were being beaten at school. J's school grew and grew and became very successful. She was proud of what she achieved and feels very sad to have had to leave it behind. She still teaches a class online.

J was seeking asylum and has now been granted refugee status. She was supported by EYST and is now a volunteer with them. EYST helped J with her asylum claim and she now helps others. She used to feel very lost – the system is very hard to understand and her English was not very good which made it difficult for J to understand the systems and processes that she need to engage with. EYST were very supportive, *"so so good for people"*.

She made some very beautiful delicate ceramics, without previous experience. She really liked coming every week, knowing that there was something new to try, and new people to meet. Through the sessions she met some new people who had arrived from Afghanistan and was able to help them, share useful information about transport and English lessons, make them feel comfortable and connected. J enjoyed seeing what everyone had created each week. She liked getting to know people from many other countries and felt it was important and beneficial for everyone to come together. Her ethos is, *"I help someone, someone helps me"*.

“  
the [Mission Gallery] sessions  
made me very happy  
”

**B**  
B is seeking asylum from Myanmar. She is Rohingya and explained to us how she suffered unimaginable trauma before escaping her country. B was very fearful of being identified as if she were to be returned to Myanmar she would be executed. B was very emotional throughout our interview, and it was clear to us how much trauma and suffering she had experienced and how these experiences had taken a toll on her mental and physical well-being .

When B fled her country she didn't realise how much it had taken a toll on her mind, but also on her body. She now has lots of physical problems and daily pain. She also realised how fearful and scared everyone had been around her, how much tension and fear everyone carries in their body. She saw how relaxed everyone was in a free country.

B described how now there are terrible floods and that many people have died back home. She explained that there is no help for the people who have been affected and many people – particularly very young and very old people are dying. B felt a lot of guilt about being in the UK and not being able to do anything to help. She also feels rage towards the government that was doing nothing to help the people she cares about.

B described how knowledge and information is kept from people in Myanmar and how she was not allowed to learn there. She valued being able to freely access information, knowledge and learning in the UK. B had enjoyed coming to the Mission Gallery workshops. She enjoyed the relaxed and welcoming feel of the sessions and valued being able to express her creativity. She particularly loved being with the artists and the other people in the workshops and learning new skills from them. This made her very happy.

## **S**

S arrived from Afghanistan with her three young children and husband 7 months ago. EYST helped her with practical things as well as advice. She described how they helped her with clothes for her children, a baby group so she could meet other parents, they helped her to find an English class to improve her English. She expressed her huge gratitude to the help provided by EYST.

S used to be an art teacher back in Afghanistan, so she really enjoyed the Mission Gallery sessions. She came "*many times*" to the sessions and thought they were "*very good*". S reflected that the sessions enabled her to practice her English in a relaxed environment, with other people also learning English. The workshops helped her to meet lots of new people and feel less isolated in Swansea. She was particularly happy that she was able to bring her children, and to know that they were being looked after whilst she could enjoy the creativity. Her daughter who is 9 was able to join in with the workshops, and S was happy to see that this had helped her daughter to make lots of new friends.

## **T**

T is from Myanmar. He came to Swansea after living in London for a short time. He has been in Swansea for 5 months and calls it, "*beautiful Swansea*". He found it hard at first as he knew no one in Swansea. EYST were "*very helpful*". They helped him to find information and make connections. This helped him to feel less stressed.

T reflected that when you are an asylum seeker you cannot work or study and this is hard because you have nothing to do. T owned a mobile phone repair shop in Myanmar and he is used to being busy, working hard and being active. T reflected that the Mission Gallery sessions gave him something that he could do, something he could enjoy taking part in, even though he would not describe himself as creative. T really valued having someone to take care of his children whilst he was taking part in the workshops. This enabled him to bring his 3 children along and still be able to take part in the activities. It was especially useful before he was able to get his children into school and they had nothing to do all day.

## W

W volunteers and helped out during some of the Mission Gallery workshops. Her daughter recently died and this had been a very hard time for W. W finds that it helps if she can help others and she loves being creative. W writes poems, and finds that inspiration comes to her in ideas and words. She finds that she "gets lost in time" when she is being creative. She doesn't usually have a particular idea in mind, she just lets her creativity flow and see where it takes her. She really values creativity and feels that it is important for people to have the opportunity to express themselves creatively.

W helped by doing simple things like holding someone's baby so that they could take part. She really enjoyed being inspired by the different people from all over the world, hearing their stories and helping them to take part in the sessions.



(Photo above shows an EYST volunteer caring for the smaller children of participants at a workshop at the Sanctuary Hub.)

## M and A

M from Eritrea and A from India are two young women who met whilst sharing a house. They have both found EYST to be really helpful and have been able to access lots of advice and support through EYST. They both like Swansea and they feel that there are a lot of activities that they can get involved in.

Through EYST they have done many useful and interesting activities which they have really valued. They were both able to come to a number of the Mission Gallery workshops. They were both able to meet new people and they enjoyed how sociable and relaxed the sessions were. They reflected that they didn't have to worry about getting something wrong, which made the workshops feel like a fun and safe space. The welcoming atmosphere created by EYST and Mission Gallery helped them to feel more connected to other people during the sessions. They were both really proud of what they made during the workshops and wanted to show me some photos of their creations on their phones. Both said that they would recommend the Mission Gallery workshops to others.

## N

N homeschools her two children aged 7 and 11. They came to quite a few of the Mission Gallery workshops including mosaics and ceramics. N reflected that sometimes it is difficult to find activities that are interesting and challenging for the children and that some activities geared towards children can be "*a bit patronising*" and a bit simplistic. Sometimes children's activities seemed to be focused on producing a particular creative product, rather than on developing their skills. N felt that the Mission Gallery workshops were professional and challenged the children to develop their artistic and creative skills. N liked this about the sessions. She felt they were also relaxed and let the children follow their own creative instincts, to develop their own individual ideas which she valued. She felt it was really great to have the chance to try creative practice that would require quite a bit financial outlay to try at home, such as ceramics.

“  
the artists were passionate about what  
they did and very knowledgeable  
”

N and the children valued how relaxed the sessions were and the children remarked that they felt free to try new techniques out without worrying about doing something wrong or making mistakes. They felt supported by the artists and Mission Gallery staff to learn from whatever happened and just try something different - to experiment. The sessions created a safe space for both N and her children to explore their creativity.

N felt it was nice to meet other people, and particularly valued being able to meet other parents who were homeschooling their children. N was able to form new connections which she has continued outside of the sessions.

## 5. Delivery and Management

There were productive and collaborative discussions between Cwmpas, EYST, CIWA and Mission Gallery at the start of the project to establish the theories of change. This positive communication continued throughout the project, with Mission Gallery regularly meeting with the partner organisations to ensure that the workshops were meeting the needs of the participants and making slight adjustments to improve the experience for the participants as needed.

Throughout the project, the staff from CIWA and EYST reflected to us that the workshops were “*so well organised*”. In almost all of our interviews with participants, they spoke about how welcoming, safe and inclusive they felt at each workshop. The Mission Gallery team listened and were proactive in ensuring that the well-being of the participants, staff, volunteers and artists was always the primary consideration. Participants from both organisations were also presented with ‘goodie bags’ full of creative and art materials to enable them to continue their creative learning journeys.

The founder of the Chinese Autism Support Group explained to us that it was important to feel confidence in working with any organisation where you were bringing parents and autistic children. She reflected that they had full confidence in Mission Gallery to deliver workshops where everyone would feel included and respected. The Asylum and Refugee Support Worker from EYST reflected that they had developed a strong, positive and productive relationship with Mission Gallery, and that;

“  
It was like a dream partnership. I’m so proud - proud of being a part of it.  
”

## 6. Conclusions

The information gathered throughout this evaluation provides clear evidence that the project successfully achieved the aims and impacts set out in the original theories of change.

The interviews with the CIWA parent carers revealed how common it is for this particular group of people to feel isolated and to have poor mental health. All of them described having little time for themselves and many spoke about the “*stress*” in their lives from caring and from fighting for the best for their children. Some of our interviews revealed that the parents and carers of autistic children can feel unwelcome in community spaces and that their children’s behaviour can be misunderstood and their parenting judged negatively. Some of the parent carers described negative attitudes towards autism that they had experienced, particularly within Chinese community and there is research evidence to support the widespread stigmatisation of autism and autistic people in Chinese culture.<sup>9 10 11</sup> The parent carers and the young people from CIWA felt comfortable and relaxed in Mission Gallery. The parent carers reflected that they felt confident to bring their children to the workshops and that the workshops felt “safe” and “welcoming”. Mission Gallery were able to create a safe and inclusive space where the CIWA young people could thrive and be supported to be creative and, importantly, they were able to be themselves.

Many of the parent carers and the young people from CIWA reflected that they had developed both creative confidence and new creative skills. Some were inspired to change their perceptions of themselves, the workshops enabling them to see themselves as creative and artistic, with one young person now confident to say of themselves, “I am an artist”. The workshops were beneficial for the parent carers’ mental well-being, with many of the parent carers reflecting that the sessions reduced their feelings of stress and worry. Some of the sessions we observed with the parent carers were full of joking and laughter by the end of the sessions, and we could see the participants visibly relaxing as the workshop progressed.

The workshops also enabled the parent carers and the young people to come together and connect with each other. The stigma faced by the parent carers and the young people with autism was something that this project wanted to challenge. Many of the parent carers described the isolation they felt before being able to access support from the CIWA autism support service, and the negative impact that this had on their own mental well-being as well as on the well-being of their children. By supporting them to come together to learn in a safe space with professional artists, the project enabled them to feel more confident in their creative skills, to feel included and to be themselves.

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<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844024111449/pdf?md5=1e272d2d1981c1e5a98a39fe986075d1&pid=1-s2.0-S2405844024111449-main.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10499991/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://chineseautism.org.uk/autism-chinese-culture/>

The evaluation revealed similar outcomes for the participants of the EYST workshops. So many of the participants at the workshops were eager to speak with us for the evaluation which was a testament to the positive experience they had had at the Mission Gallery workshops. There were a number of interviews where participants reflected on how much they had enjoyed doing creative activities. It became clear as we spoke with people that their lives are almost entirely focused on their asylum process, on their own and their families well-being, on their trauma, on learning English. They are doing everything they can to remain in the UK where they and their family can be safe. They have very little time or money to do things that are creative or fun, and one of the most significant impacts for the EYST participants was in being able to do something just for the joy of it.

People seeking asylum are not permitted to work and they are often moved without notice from place to place by the Home Office. This makes it very difficult to connect with people and most of the EYST participants talked about how isolated they had felt. It was clear how valued the work of the team at EYST was, how vital their support is, and how EYST was seen as a place of safety, support and sanctuary by everyone that we spoke with. The participants described being able to relax during the workshops and feeling safe was important to them. Many of the participants used the word "safe" or "safe space" to describe the workshops during our interviews. Research evidence supports the positive impact of creating safe spaces for people seeking asylum to engage in creativity.<sup>12 13</sup>.

Many of the participants we interviewed had met new people and formed new connections through the workshops. One of the EYST team reflected that since taking part in the sessions, they had seen more people saying hello to one another. They reflected that often people tended to stick with people from their home country, but that the sessions had helped people from different countries get to know each other and form social connections. Again the research evidence supporting the impact of arts-based interventions for asylum seeking communities is clear on the benefits for reducing isolation, "*Another emerging, commonly reported additional benefits of art therapy that we found is rebuilding social connection and trust.*"<sup>14</sup> In our interviews, the participants spoke about meeting new people through the sessions, feeling less isolated and making friends. Families who were homeschooling their children were able to connect and form relationships outside of the workshops. People who had been through the asylum process were able to provide advice and support for those who were new to Swansea.

The exhibition was an important part of the project's outcomes. Academic research has found a consistent evidence base supporting the positive impact of "*Exchange and dialogue between host community and arriving individuals*"<sup>15</sup> The exhibition not only supported the participants from both organisations to see their work displayed professionally in an art gallery, but also showcased the talent and creativity of marginalised groups that may not usually be featured in an exhibition. Mission Gallery's amplification of these voices, not only facilitating their creativity through workshops but also presenting their art to the public, helps generate understanding and reduce stigma.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roni-Kaufman-2/publication/281351713\\_Using\\_arts-based\\_research\\_to\\_help\\_visualize\\_community\\_intervention\\_in\\_international\\_aid/links/55e844e608aeb65162630094/Using-arts-based-research-to-help-visualize-community-intervention-in-international-aid.pdf?tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roni-Kaufman-2/publication/281351713_Using_arts-based_research_to_help_visualize_community_intervention_in_international_aid/links/55e844e608aeb65162630094/Using-arts-based-research-to-help-visualize-community-intervention-in-international-aid.pdf?tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19)

<sup>13</sup> <https://jecs.pl/index.php/jecs/article/view/1375>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/org/science/article/pii/S1462373023000597>

<sup>15</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0020872815592686>



The project has also achieved outcomes and impacts that are clearly aligned with both the Arts Council of Wales's strategic plan and the "Create" funding's core principles. The Arts Council of Wales explains that the "Create" fund, "...continues our commitment to the principles of the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015."<sup>16</sup> The project aligns directly with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015<sup>17</sup> and the well-being goals outlined within it.

The 'Cysylltu/Connect' project has supported the people who took part to build connection and community with others as well as supporting inclusivity and reducing stigma through the exhibition. This aligns with the well-being goal of, '**A Wales of Cohesive Communities**'. Exhibiting the artworks created during the workshops in Mission Gallery's main exhibition space gave participants a clear sense of how much they are valued and respected, and the value of their creative talent. The exhibition was a way for Mission Gallery to enable the wider public to gain an insight into the lives of the individuals that took part and to help reduce the stigma around both autism and people who seek asylum.

The project was designed and delivered with compassion and empathy, placing the well-being of participants, staff and artists at the centre of all decisions and in planning all activities. The positive impact of the project on the mental well-being of the participants was clear from our interviews, and this approach aligns with the Well-being Act's goal of creating, '**A Healthier Wales**'.

In line with the Well-being Act's goal of creating, '**A More Equal Wales**', Mission Gallery has delivered an inclusive and collaborative project, working respectfully and productively with partner organisations. The project has connected and supported some of the most marginalised and excluded groups in our society. By creating a strong sense of community and belonging, the project enabled participants to forge new social bonds that reduced isolation and improved mental well-being. The 'Cysylltu/Connect' project has had a significant and lasting positive impact on the lives of the participants and has created a legacy of creative confidence, skills and self-belief that will continue beyond the timeframe of the funding.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://arts.wales/funding/create>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

## 7. Learning

The learning from this project is valuable for any community or cultural space wishing to be more inclusive and accessible to people seeking asylum and people with, or caring for those with autism.

The key learning points that have come out of this evaluation:

- Engaging marginalised and excluded communities is far more effective when co-designed and delivered with specialist partner organisations with expertise in engaging the target groups.
- A critical success factor in engaging marginalised communities is to listen and respond to the knowledge and experience brought to a project by partners and community members. By establishing and developing meaningful collaboration with EYST and CIWA, Mission Gallery was able to successfully deliver the intended project outcomes.
- Co-producing a theory of change enabled the project team to proactively identify potential challenges and barriers, such as the need for financial support for transport to workshops. This enabled Mission Gallery to implement measures to overcome barriers and mitigate risks and made the project more inclusive and accessible.
- Using professional artists to deliver workshops led to a sense of accomplishment for the participants. The project's emphasis on process over product and the focus on the development of creative skills helped participants to feel valued and to gain confidence in their own creative abilities.
- The feelings of relaxation, calm, trust, safety and belonging that project participants experienced during the workshops was a direct result of Mission Gallery's commitment to creating safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces. Mission Gallery's willingness to listen, to bring workshops to each community and to create spaces that met the needs of the participants was an essential part of participants fully engaging and returning week after week.
- Exhibiting the art created throughout the project in the main gallery space was an effective way to demonstrate how much Mission Gallery valued the CIWA and EYST participants. The exhibition also raised awareness amongst the wider public of the challenges and the stigma often faced by these two communities, whilst showcasing the incredible creative talent and potential that they possess.

## 8. Recommendations

1. Mission Gallery and the Arts Council of Wales to share the learning from this project with other cultural and artistic spaces, to support them to be more accessible for people seeking asylum and for people with autism.
2. Mission Gallery to continue to develop productive and collaborative partnerships with community organisations to bring people from other isolated or marginalised communities into the gallery.
3. Arts Council of Wales to fund further initiatives that enable more people with autism or who are seeking asylum to benefit from arts-based interventions.

# CWMPAS

T: 0300 111 5050

E: [jenny.phillips@cwmpas.coop](mailto:jenny.phillips@cwmpas.coop)

**[cwmpas.coop](http://cwmpas.coop)**

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