



# Community Foundation

Vital Signs North East: Culture



## Culture

How philanthropy can help foster the North East's unique culture, from iconic theatres, museums and concert halls to diverse community arts, heritage and sports groups



# About this Vital Signs report

Vital Signs is a Community Foundation resource presenting information about a range of issues affecting our area. It draws on statistics, published research, local expertise and knowledge gathered through funding across the region to 'take the pulse' of communities and inform a better philanthropic response to their needs. We see it as the start of a conversation and would love to hear your views about the ambitions of local communities and what more philanthropy and charitable funding could do to meet them.

This is our fourth Vital Signs North East 2024 report. It examines how philanthropy can help strengthen culture to benefit our region's people and places.

## **Vital Signs will explore ten themes during 2024:**

**Economy** – How can philanthropy help build a strong regional economy where everyone benefits from increased prosperity?

**Education** – What opportunities can charitable funding create for people to learn, develop skills and achieve their potential?

**Health** – How can charitable funders improve the overall health of our region, and reduce differences in health outcomes between richer and poorer people?

**Homes** – Can philanthropists help ensure that there are decent, secure homes for everyone who needs them?

**Environment** – What support can philanthropy provide to help communities look after the environment and ensure the region rises to the challenge of climate change?

**Access** – How can philanthropists help people overcome the barriers they face in getting access to opportunities and services?

**Community** – What can charitable giving contribute to the task of ensuring our communities are strong, welcoming and able to cope with the challenges of uncertain times?

**Culture** – How can philanthropy help foster the North East's unique culture, from iconic theatres, museums and concert halls to diverse community arts, heritage and sports groups?

**Justice** – How can charitable funding support work to protect people from crime, prevent discrimination and give opportunities for offender rehabilitation?

**Living standards** – How should philanthropic funds support those faced with a decline in living standards due to economic pressures and rising costs?

In addition to reporting on each of these themes we will produce a brief printed summary of our findings.

# Contents

About this Vital Signs report	2
Executive summary	4
The importance of culture to a healthy, happy society	6
Arts and creativity	9
Heritage	12
Sport	14
Philanthropy and culture: case studies	17
Philanthropy in action: North East Fund for the Arts	19
Let's talk	24

“Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society even when perfect is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future.”

**Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942**

## A note on terminology

In this report we use the following geographic terms:

**“The North East” or “The North East region”:** this refers to the North East English region which will soon cover the Tees Valley Combined Authority and new North East Combined Authority

**Tees Valley:** this refers to the area covered by the Tees Valley Combined Authority comprising Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees

**The North East sub-region:** this refers to the area to be covered by the new North East Combined Authority comprising Northumberland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Gateshead, Sunderland and County Durham.

# Executive summary

**This publication is one of a series of Vital Signs reports that the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland is publishing in 2024 looking at the needs and aspirations of communities from Northumberland to Teesside and how philanthropy can help meet them.**

Our focus here is culture. We use the term to include all the things that can bring people together – either as audiences or through participation – and which help build a sense of community, break down barriers and allow us to make sense of the world. For the purposes of this report, our definition of culture encompasses arts, heritage and non-elite sport.

The cultural sector has been hit hard in recent years. As will be seen across all the ten Vital Signs 2024 themes, the disruptive effects of Brexit, together with the challenges of the Covid pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, have impacted on the sector's capacity to contribute to the life of the North East, while also presenting new challenges and demands. Nevertheless, culture retains the potential to make a positive contribution to the lives of the 2.6 million people who live and work here.

Civil society<sup>1</sup> organisations in the cultural sphere offer many routes to participation. It might be as a weekly contributor to a new writing group; as a volunteer coach with a grassroots football club; as an aspiring songwriter performing in a community venue; or visitor to one of the region's many heritage sites or community festivals. Philanthropy has a major part to play in making all these things happen. Despite still forming the backbone of

many cultural organisations' income, public funding has decreased in real terms. Local authority budgets have been squeezed at the same time as audiences, participants and visitors have had less disposable income. Add in the fact that the sector often strives to reach, because it is so well placed to do so, people who are least engaged – such as those experiencing poverty, mental health issues or disability for example – and the issue of reduced funding is exacerbated. Put simply, there are many more people that would benefit from engaging in culture, but less money from the state or their own disposable incomes to allow them to do so. Civil society organisations need extra funding to help close the gap.

As referenced throughout this report, participating in culture is a central tenet of a healthy and happy life. It should be a basic right to have access to a range of different activities that can nourish, fulfil and inspire. There should be opportunities to try (and fail!) at things to enable every member of our society to find what works for them. The benefits of cultural engagement are both personal and societal.



## Want to know more?

You can download all our Vital Signs reports as they are produced via our website at [www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns](http://www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns)

**The Community Foundation believes that philanthropic support is essential in three areas:**

1

**Ensuring everyone has opportunities to engage in culture – for fun and fulfilment as well as to develop skills – and so benefitting individuals and society, by:**

- Supporting grassroots activity with a range of lifelong entry points and progression routes – one-off, sessional or ongoing.
- Nurturing talent and investing in regional opportunities that allow exceptional people to flourish in the North East and stay here in creative jobs.
- Prioritising activities in places where there are fewer opportunities, and with communities facing additional barriers, including girls and women, disabled people and people from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

2

**Funding arts, heritage and non-elite sport activities which act as effective ways to address the region’s social and economic challenges and opportunities by:**

- Reducing health inequalities
- Supporting participation and attainment in education
- Creating routes into employment
- Enhancing prosperity through tourism and inward investment

3

**Increasing the capacity of civil society organisations in culture by:**

- Providing more core funding, and whenever possible, multi-year support
- Supporting volunteering
- Enabling effective engagement with local and regional partners



# The importance of culture to a healthy, happy society

**Access to, and participation in, culture is a vital part of a healthy, prosperous and fulfilling society. There are a multitude of studies and reports that firmly establish how a thriving cultural sector (taking our broad definition encompassing arts, heritage and sport) means people live healthier, happier lives, while creating jobs, reducing the burden on NHS and other public services and promoting belonging and community cohesion.**

To make sense of available data and research, this report is broken down into three themes: arts and creativity, heritage, and sport. The three case studies included also represent these three sub-sectors. But they each demonstrate how a shared activity has enabled outcomes far greater than the sum of their parts. This is what participation in culture – in all its broad forms, sectors, niches and combinations – can do. Local, knowledge-based philanthropy has a key role in getting people together around a common cultural cause and letting magic happen.

There is a recurrent theme throughout this report. The national funding picture is bleak, with National Lottery Heritage Fund, Sport England and Arts Council England (ACE) all working on reduced or stand-still budgets. Local authorities are also squeezed. The cost-of-living crisis is having an impact on families' disposable incomes across the country, with the North East faring worse and household budgets stretched with little room to pay for cultural activities. Philanthropic giving cannot fill this funding gap. However, for many civil society organisations, it can reduce uncertainty, support longer-term planning and ensure a stronger focus on delivery through core funding.

Cultural activities, and the organisations that deliver them, are also particularly good at reaching people who might otherwise be disengaged from support and services where other approaches might fail. Enabling a young

neurodivergent child to express themselves through dance can have a positive impact on their ability to concentrate at school. Giving the routine and structure of a physical training programme to a teenager at risk of school exclusion can pave the way for them to re-engage. A recently widowed older woman meeting peers regularly for a knit-and-natter session at a community centre can be signposted to other support. A fair society will have these opportunities available for all to pick and choose those that best meet their needs and interests.

The Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) conducts an annual participation survey to track the latest trends in engagement by adults 16-plus in those sectors falling within the department's remit. The latest available data<sup>ii</sup> (April 22 to March 23) show the North East as having average engagement in all but one area (libraries). There is a statutory requirement for public library provision in England but as those services are trimmed and reduced, community organisations are increasingly stepping in to protect and enliven those buildings. The particulars around community asset transfers will be discussed more in Vital Signs: Community. But within our context here, it is worth stating that those buildings can play a key part in enabling local community cultural provision.

As we enter a new phase of devolution with the North East Combined Authority (NECA), the opportunity to place culture front and centre is amplified. County Durham's bid for City of Culture status, though unsuccessful, can be seen as a statement of intent to cement culture as an important part of regional policy-making. So as the portfolio holder for culture within NECA, Durham Council is well placed to lead on this opportunity, with its significant high-profile venues and events. The light festival Lumiere, for example, has continued to grow since its inception in 2009 with the 2019 event reporting an economic value of

£11.5 million and a return on investment to the Council of 1,925%.<sup>iii</sup> Meanwhile, the Seat Unique Riverside Cricket Ground in Chester-le-Street is the only international ground north of Leeds. Alongside the economic and policy drive within NECA, culture has a defining role to play in promoting the North East more visibly, more coherently and more optimistically to the rest of the country, and internationally.

There are lessons to learn for NECA from the Tees Valley Combined Authority which has already placed culture as central to its strategy. 'Great Place Tees Valley' was a four-year (2018-2021) large-scale programme of arts, heritage and cultural activities taking place across the five boroughs. Teesside University evaluated the programme, and its final report cites several positive outcomes including reach and engagement from a significant proportion (50%) of people living within the most disadvantaged areas on the indices of multiple deprivation scale. In addition, there was increased collaboration between sectors, greater community confidence and sector building and, crucially, a transformational effect on children and young people around increased confidence and ambition and a positive sense of place.<sup>iv</sup>

Cultural opportunities for the region are there for the taking, but they need fair resourcing. Each of the following sections

takes a broad overview of the challenges and opportunities. They could all be a report in themselves and, in many instances, the 'tool' by which an outcome can be supported may be interchangeable. So, where we refer to evidence that sport can reduce anti-social behaviour, a youth theatre could too. Where we state the importance of a heritage project to help communities connect to a regeneration scheme, a songwriting programme could have the same result. And so on. In short, creating as many opportunities as possible for the people of the North East to engage in high quality, local and community informed activities is essential.

We focus here on the work that cultural organisations can deliver to break down barriers, to co-create with communities and to positively impact on wellbeing. But it is important also to acknowledge the role philanthropy can play in enabling cultural institutions to bring exemplars of national and international culture to our region. A part of the ecology of cultural ambition is for people to witness world-renowned art and sport where they live. And a thriving, high-profile cultural offer is a crucial part of the attraction that the region can have for potential investors and employees.



# All aboard?

## How philanthropy can help engage people who face barriers to inclusion in cultural activities

Not everyone has equitable opportunities to take part in cultural activities because of where they live or go to school, or because a chosen activity is not valued in their community. But disabled people, women, people in poverty and those from some Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic backgrounds face further barriers. For them, philanthropy can do much to help level the playing field.

By way of example, one area where encouraging participation can pay dividends is in keeping girls engaged in sport. Girls are more likely to drop out as they become teenagers. By ages 17-18, only 3 in 10 say they 'are sporty' compared to 6 in 10 teenage boys.<sup>v</sup> A grant to Centre West in Newcastle of £2,763 from Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland's Appletree fund enabled the organisation to establish two additional girls-only football sessions. They now run three, for ages 5-8, 9-11 and 12-plus. Feedback from the Centre says:

*"The funding we received has had a huge impact on the young girls that have attended, they have been able to attend a safe structured session, close to home and totally free which has broke so many barriers for them. For an organisation like ours to be able to still continue to support girls and women's football/sport through funders like you, we continue to grow and encourage girls to get involved, we build solid foundations based on honest relationships."*

Women in Sport<sup>vi</sup> does policy and advocacy work in this area with families, teachers and coaches to try to tackle the barriers. But it's not only in organised sport that we see this decline. Recent work by Make Space for Girls looked at how parks and their facilities (such

as skate parks, multi-use games areas and BMX tracks) are publicly considered to be places for all teenagers to be active, but 88% of users are boys.<sup>vii</sup> These spaces could, with better design, be more welcoming space for girls to be active outdoors.

There is also much to be done to create equity in access for disabled people to participate in cultural opportunities. A recent report by Difference North East<sup>viii</sup> found three key barriers. These were grouped as social (for example feeling excluded, beginning with marketing materials that feature only non-disabled people), physical (such as inadequate toilet facilities or no ramp access) and economic (including personal incomes susceptible to inflation and the 'disabled tax' of additional heating, washing and more complex travel arrangements). Difference asserts that non-participation by disabled people must not be mistaken as non-interest. Disabled people have to use a disproportionate amount of their energy simply deciding whether or not making the effort to get to an activity is worth it. So, it is incumbent on charitable funders and donors to consider issues of accessibility when looking at supporting cultural institutions and activities.





# Arts and creativity

**'Arts and creativity' covers forms such as visual art, literature, dance, theatre, music and combined arts. Here we draw extensively on the published reports and available data of Arts Council England (ACE).**

In addition, we look at information on the creative industries, defined as those that 'have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation and the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.'<sup>ix</sup> This includes publishing, design, fashion, film and TV, and game design. Art forms and creative industries are intertwined. It isn't much of a leap to see that igniting, nurturing and supporting creativity in communities, starting with those still in education, will lead to opportunities for job creation, business start-up and collaborations that can have a positive impact on the North East economy.

We all likely take for granted that arts are an essential and vital part of a thriving world. We enjoy the fruits of artistic endeavour daily listening to music, watching a drama on TV or happening upon public art on a walk. But the narrative of arts being 'extra', 'nice to have', a luxury, persists. As such, the case for supporting the arts is often made in economic terms, or through the lens of public health outcomes. These arguments stand up, and are explored later, but this report would be doing a disservice to the effect of the arts if it did not begin by emphasising the bedrock of what they can be. Engaging in the arts is to be human, and enjoyment is a sufficient end in itself. The arts can also shine a light and focus minds. A high-profile recent example can be seen in the accelerated coverage and subsequent change in policy-making arising from a TV dramatisation of the Post Office scandal. And the arts can amplify voices – not least as seen in the North East's rich disability arts scene which has agitated for change since the early 90s and is still going strong, with organisations like Arcadea, The Twisting Ducks and Little Cog.

So, cultural literacy through arts and creativity enables people to make sense of the world, imagine, tackle problems and live better lives. And yet the national context for arts funding is bleak. Since 2010, support for local arts and funding for museums, galleries, and theatres has been reduced across England by £166.8m, a drop of 30%.<sup>x</sup> At the time of writing, local authorities including Birmingham and Suffolk, are announcing 100% cuts to their arts funding. ACE has seen budgets squeezed over 14 years of austerity meaning that most of its funded organisations are operating on standstill budgets – effectively reduced in real terms.

At the same time as this funding crisis comes to a head, there is a demonstrable erosion of the value of creativity in schools. The 2022 report commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation 'Arts in Schools: Foundations of the Future' lays this bare:<sup>xi</sup>

*Structural barriers have led to a lack of subject parity. At every stage in the schooling system the arts are disadvantaged: at initial teacher recruitment and training through to a lack of support for arts teaching in primary schools. The prioritisation of EBacc (nonarts) subjects in secondary accountability measures has meant a reduction in the level of arts subjects, teachers and resources available, and therefore declining GCSE and A Level take-up. Dance and drama have no parity at inspection level, and film and digital media have been excluded from the national curriculum. We have an assessment regime that does not work for arts subjects, which require different kinds of measurement and the investment required to develop these has not been made because of their perceived low status.*

The full Gulbenkian report is a clarion call to policy makers to place greater emphasis on arts within the state education sector, and echoes the findings of the Durham Commission,<sup>xii</sup> published in 2019, which underline that valuing creativity, not just within subjects that fall into that category (drama, dance, music etc.) but within all teaching enables greater prosperity all round.

Regionally, initiatives such as the North East Cultural Learning Fund go some way to address this balance by seeking to support early creative interventions in schools (and other youth settings) that establish partnerships between educators and artists. **As school budgets shrink and teachers are expected to do more, philanthropy can help alleviate pressure by augmenting and enhancing learning with discrete projects.** These could be direct involvement for children and young people, professional development for teachers or strengthened sector partnerships. But any such support from philanthropy should avoid straying into statutory obligations for universal education.

The economic ramifications of limiting both funding and education in arts and creativity may be felt for generations. Igniting creative potential boosts prosperity. A 2019 report by Centre for Economics and Business Research cited that the arts and culture industry directly contributed £21.2bn in turnover and £10.8bn in gross value added (GVA).<sup>xiii</sup> The ecology of much, if not all, of the arts and culture industry is such that the commercial, for-profit sectors rely on a publicly and philanthropically subsidised pipeline. Levels of investment, and opportunity, in culture at grassroots, educational and start-up level has a major impact on economic output.

There is also a legacy of disparity in access to the arts. But the good news is that there has been a marked shift in national policy, with the new ten-year strategy from ACE, 'Let's Create'. This sees investment principles that prioritise creative communities themselves, arguably moving away from what might be seen as a more elitist approach. This means that, nationally, we can see public subsidy giving credence and status to what

grassroots, community, participatory arts organisations have been doing for years. This is heartening!

And at a regional level, there are now more ACE National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) than there were in 2018, and we have three (of a total of 17) of its Creative People and Place projects: in Sunderland, County Durham, and in Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland. These programmes focus on places where involvement in culture and creativity is below the national average. While on the one hand that can be seen as negative (there is more need here) it should mean more investment flows to the region. When ACE announced its 2023-2026 round of NPOs and Major Partner Museums, the North East saw increased investment both in the number of awards and their value.<sup>xiv</sup> This forms part of the story (see data table in the appendix) when looking at the national spread of investments. For the people of the North East, the spend per head across all ACE programmes is just below the average of £14, at £13.43. In keeping with other Vital Signs reports, we show comparator figures for the South East but here they reveal, perhaps surprisingly, that the North East is better served on that metric. However, the inclusion of London figures underlines the long-standing argument that the capital is disproportionately favoured when it comes to national funding for the arts.

Regionally there are cautious spots of optimism if the positive potential of arts and culture can be kept at the top policy makers' agendas. The North of Tyne devolved authority has made culture, and the creative industries particularly, a central part of its policy. This is evidenced through a range of programmes and investment including business support, finance and workspace provision. A key part of North of Tyne's policy has been the creation of three Culture Creative Zones in Newcastle, North Shields and Berwick-upon-Tweed. They are central to the tenet of an 'Inclusive Growth' approach looking beyond gross domestic product (GDP) and gross value added (GVA) to support a thriving economy that everyone can contribute to and benefit from. It means addressing regional inequality and nurturing

the drivers of good health, education and skills, alongside growing high productivity sectors, attracting inward investment, and supporting resilient supply chains.<sup>xv</sup>

Meanwhile, plans for the Crown Works Studios, a new film and TV production site in Sunderland backed by government, are forecast to generate £334m for the local economy every year and create 8,450 jobs in a wide range of sectors. The initiative also demonstrates a partnership approach that includes skills development.<sup>xvi</sup> The 2024 economy Vital Signs report outlines the challenges and opportunities for the North East which we won't replicate here; **however, donors may consider those priorities through the lens of culture in our region and remember that there are tangible, and significant, economic benefits that investing in culture unlocks.**

As we head to greater devolution with the wider North East Combined Authority (NECA)

there is a sense of optimism, as culture is a key part of its scope. While the devolution deal does not replace local authority funding for culture, it does represent a chance to augment and enhance the area's arts venues, organisations and activity.

The Tees Valley is ahead, with its devolved authority (covering Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, Darlington and Hartlepool) set up in 2016. The area's Strategic Economic Plan<sup>xvii</sup> cites digital, creative and culture, and leisure as key sectors that will help deliver an aim to boost the economy by £2.8 billion and create 25,000 jobs by 2026. And, as referenced earlier in this report, having a lead portfolio holder for Culture in NECA (Durham Council) will help enable a united voice, as South Tyneside, Sunderland and Gateshead join the North of Tyne authorities, with their own unique assets to form the regional offer.



# Heritage

**The preservation, celebration and consideration of heritage has inherent benefits for society, allowing us to look forward as well as remembering people, places and moments.**

The significance was starkly apparent in the outpouring of grief evoked with the felling of a single tree on Hadrian's Wall in 2023. Sycamore Gap was mourned the world over with TV, radio and newspaper articles devoted to people recalling their special memories of events, people and moments that took place there. It is a prime example of how landscapes and buildings, and those who seek to protect them, are a vital part of shaping who we are.

When we discuss heritage, we may think mainly of museums and galleries. As well as often being of heritage significance themselves, they also conserve, display and advocate for the sector. The North East has a host of historically significant museums and galleries and the issues they face around funding and costs are covered within the earlier arts and creativity section.

And, as with arts, there are economic advantages from investing in heritage. Historic England has commissioned the Centre for Economic and Business Research (CEBR) to assess the economic impact of the heritage sector in the UK. While the report acknowledges difficulties in defining where the sector begins and ends (sub-sectors range from preservation and conservation, which includes the construction industries, to libraries, museums, archives, events and festivals), the CEBR estimates that in 2021 England's heritage sector directly generated a gross value added (GVA) contribution of £15.4 billion to UK GDP. But the North East had the lowest GVA contribution of £433 million.<sup>xviii</sup>

**This suggests there is an untapped potential in our region and philanthropic investment in the heritage sector could help increase the economic fortunes of communities by better utilising those assets.**

To invest in heritage is also a sensible economic move as it goes hand in hand with tourism. And this is a virtuous circle because tourism is also instrumental "in creating pride



in local communities.<sup>xxix</sup> Nationally, the tourism sector is still fighting to recover from Covid. The Government's tourism recovery plan details that in early 2023 domestic tourism is close to pre-pandemic levels but international visitor numbers and spend are still below. In the North East, tourism is the fourth largest industry sector and accounts for £5.4bn a year and 58,000 jobs.<sup>xx</sup>

There is an increasing body of research articulating the value of heritage to people's sense of self and by extension their sense of community. 'Place attachment' bonds can be both emotional and functional in nature, emerging through factors including personal experiences and memories in a place, and from social connections.<sup>xxi</sup> Such bonds have a range of mental health and well-being advantages such as improved self-esteem and, in turn, people are motivated to look after their places. In short, heritage is a weapon in the armoury of civil society to help meet needs for connection, stability, relaxation, continuity and security. And historic buildings and settings such as market places, places of worship and town halls offer important spaces for people to come together. One study found that residents in more traditional, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use neighbourhoods were more likely to know their neighbours, participate politically, trust others, and be involved socially compared to those living in more modern, car-dependent areas.<sup>xxii</sup> As such, preserving and reinvigorating heritage as part of any regeneration project is a smart move. Looking to the unique heritage and history of a place, as plans are made for its future, can reinstate something of what might have been lost.

National schemes such as Heritage Action Zones (HAZ) take those benefits as their starting point and make the economic case for regeneration using the historic environment as a catalyst for economic growth, inward investment and as a driver for tourism. A key regional example can be found in Bishop Auckland where the HAZ builds on a major public and philanthropic investment to transform the former home of the Durham Prince Bishops, Auckland Castle, into an international faith, heritage and art destination. The five-year project has included engagement

and training to connect with the local community, encompassing projects, festivals and events. There has also been structural restoration and work to tackle long-term vacancy of some buildings.

Organisations with heritage at their core are not just about preserving the past, they are also forward focused, helping forge the evolving image of the region. Examples include regeneration in Sunderland that has seen investment in historic buildings to enable them to be used by today's communities. The Pop Recs coffee shop and venue is housed in the former Binns department store which was transformed by a £1.4 million grant through the HAZ programme. The development of the new Keel Square celebrates the city's shipbuilding past through a public sculpture. The thread weaving through them is knowledge of, and respect for, heritage while planning for the future.

In November 2023, Historic England released its annual at-risk register noting that while five North East sites have been saved, a further 13 had been added. There are a total of 262 entries in the North East including places of worship, buildings and conservation areas that are deemed at risk of neglect, decay or inappropriate change.<sup>xxiii</sup> These figures only reveal part of the heritage picture. The other side is about people, their histories and keeping places alive and accessible. Almost all successfully saved heritage sites have one thing in common: the tenacity and determination of local volunteers. And volunteers are the lifeblood of heritage organisations, from small institutions like The Weardale Museum in County Durham to large nationally organised programmes like those delivered by National Trust. While there is a strong economic case for investment, with national funding needing to go further and do more, and earned income from tourism still battling Covid's after-effects, **philanthropy can play a key role in enabling communities to feel ownership and inspiration from places of heritage that surround them, especially by supporting volunteering.**

# Sport

**As will be covered more fully in the 2024 Vital Signs Health report, regular exercise has proven benefits for both physical and mental health conditions.**

Evidence shows physical activity can help to reduce obesity, address anxiety and depression and lower instances of diabetes. And there is the associated reduced burden on the NHS, and on the economy through fewer sick days and increased productivity. But here, we focus on the importance of sport and recreation in communities as cultural tools for bringing people together. As with arts and heritage, sport is an important part of a healthy, happy and cohesive society.

The North East has strong sporting roots and visibility, as evident on any given match day. Football may be dominant, but it is not the whole story given the region's profile in athletics, basketball, cricket, rugby and many others. While the value of sport can sometimes be taken for granted, it is worth spelling out. Teamwork, co-operation, commitment, determination and a sense of belonging are just the tip of the descriptive iceberg! Sports personalities and high-profile events (as well as the week-in, week-out schedules, seasons and rounds) build excitement, raise aspiration and inspire people to have a go. And sport is often goal-driven, with progression built-in, helping engender determination, pride and recognition, all powerful motivators.

There is, however, a distinction between participating and spectating. The latter has a role in bringing people together (though it can be divisive). But it is being a grassroots participant, volunteer or supporter that is our focus. A growing body of evidence shows participation in sport can help reduce anti-social behaviour and crime, increase educational attainment, improve social cohesion and open pathways to employment. The Sport and Recreation Alliance published a comprehensive report 'Game of Life – How Sport & Recreation can help make us happier, healthier and richer' in 2012 that, as well as focusing on physical

and mental health outcomes, also examined impacts on education, antisocial behaviour and crime, and social cohesion.<sup>xxiv</sup>

However, many of the traditional routes into sport for children and young people have been eroded – in particular, youth services and extracurricular activities at schools. And children from areas with higher levels of disadvantage are less likely to engage. One in five primary and secondary pupils do no extracurricular activities at all in an average week, rising to one in four pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>xxv</sup> Pupils at independent schools do three times as much PE as those in state schools. National and Olympic squads are disproportionately made up of people who attended independent schools.<sup>xxvi</sup> So, while talent is everywhere, opportunity is not. The network of grassroots charities and voluntary organisations who deliver coaching, after-school clubs, holiday activities and taster sessions do critical work to address this inequity, often in challenging circumstances. But the scale of the problem cannot be underestimated as the adverse effects of living in poverty, the ongoing youth mental health crisis and persistent absenteeism at school continue to present challenges both to engage children and young people in the first place, and to allow them to flourish.

**There is a clear role for philanthropy to play in prioritising community sports provision in disadvantaged areas.**

It is also now acknowledged that national sports policy has previously focused too much on facilities and an assumption that major events could by themselves transform levels of participation.<sup>xxvii</sup> This has been documented in relation to the London 2012 Olympics where the proportion of adults participating in sport at least once a week fell in the following three years.<sup>xxviii</sup> While some learning was applied to the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, the Department for Culture Media and Sport stated that the physical assets themselves should be considered the legacy

of the £778m public investment. But these arguments should be balanced when thinking about the aspirational, and transformational, effects of major sports. For example, it would be remiss not to mention the Women’s Football World Cup and Euros and their effect on girls wanting to take up the sport.<sup>xxix</sup> However, the impact of inconsistent national policy is evident, with funding priorities shifting between high-profile events, infrastructure and ill-defined notions of ‘legacy’. This has meant that local, grassroots sports have been left somewhat out in the cold.

The new national policy by Sport England, ‘Uniting the Movement’,<sup>xxx</sup> acknowledges this issue. Sport England has placed those facing the most barriers – disabled people, women, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and Asian and Black communities – as central to its vision. There is also an attempt to move away from using statistics as a measure of success to include collaborative working and better sharing of information to strengthen the ecology of the sector.

Sport England’s Active Lives survey<sup>xxxi</sup> (summarised below) shows that from November 2021 to November 2022 (the first full year without Covid) 64.2% of people over 16 were taking part in the recommended 150 minutes a week of physical activity. The report outlines that women, those from areas of deprivation and some from minoritised ethnic backgrounds participate less. These trends are repeated in under-16s data, although the picture is more complex as it separates activity at school and in free time. The Active Lives data also shows the North East is lagging. But this is somewhat unsurprising given our region has higher proportions of people living in poverty, more disabled people and some concentrations of Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic communities.

A key challenge is core funding. Community Pulse is a longitudinal study of members of Sported, the UK’s largest network of community sports groups. It gives insightful data on their sustainability, needs and ambitions. Around 50% work in the most disadvantaged areas. Many are volunteer-led and operating on limited budgets, with approximately a third having an annual turnover of less than £10,000. The 2023 Community Pulse report<sup>xxxii</sup> states that the cost-of-living crisis is members’ biggest challenge with 94% worried about it. 73% of respondents state they are concerned young people will disengage or reduce their participation. The significant rise in utility bills and public liability insurance are major factors for the clubs themselves. Over three-quarters (79%) said their group has made changes in response to cost-of-living increases for participants and their families, the most common being to provide more free memberships. So costs are increasing, income is decreasing and need is greater than ever. **As such, there is a clear sense that philanthropy should prioritise core funding to grassroots groups, trusting and enabling them to spend the money where it is needed.**

The case study at the end of this report, detailing the impact of a boxing programme catering for refugee and asylum seekers, exemplifies the impact that sport can have. It was, on the surface, a grant for a group of people to access physical activity. But in the process, it aided community cohesion, inspired people to take up educational courses, improved mental wellbeing, reduced social isolation, initiated informal and formal support networks and provided structure and routine where before there was none. That is a good example of the power that sport can have when it caters to an identified and underserved

	National %	North East %	South East %
Inactive	25	29.4	22.1
Fairly Active	10.8	9.7	11.4
Active	64.2	60.9	66.5

demographic, shaping and targeting resources to serve particular needs.

It is important to highlight that data shows women and girls, as well as disabled people, are consistently missing out on opportunities to be active. Again, the cross-cutting nature of this issue means it will be further covered by the Vital Signs Access report. Here we emphasise that unless the imbalance in opportunities are addressed, sport's potential impact will be limited. Active Lives data shows that 41% of disabled people are inactive compared to 20% of non-disabled people.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This is concerning because we know disabled people are

disproportionately affected by the cost-of-living crisis and by feelings of loneliness and isolation. There is a national policy drive to ensure that provision for disabled people to enjoy sport is kept at the top of the agenda, and work around mapping, messaging, engaging and evaluating disabled sport is ongoing. **The data alone stands as evidence that organisations that are delivering disabled people opportunities to be physically active should be considered a priority for philanthropy.**





# Philanthropy and culture: case studies

## Supporting exceptional talent: Katie Grace Rushworth

Katie was 17 when she applied for the annual Alan Hull bursary which is run by the Community Foundation as part of its Young Musicians Fund. As an aspiring performer, she decided to pursue songwriting after taking part in a Youth Music-funded group, Standing Upright North Tyneside. Through that participation she completed Silver and Gold Arts Award. Katie used her £1,000 Alan Hull award to purchase high-quality home-recording equipment and take part in a production course to create a demo, *Tangled Up*. In her feedback to the Community Foundation, Katie said:

*"The Alan Hull Award has had a fundamental positive impact on my career as a young songwriter, inspiring and motivating me to continue to write and improve – it also gave me more faith in myself as a musician, and for that I am extremely grateful. It has been both career- and life-changing for me, introducing me to a number of musical peers both through the opportunities I have been able to access thanks to the Award, and the gravitas it holds; these include being invited to record a live session for BBC Introducing in the North East and supporting my successful admission application to study BA Music Performance and Industry at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London, where I am now based. Organising my sellout headline gig was a rewarding experience in having autonomy over my own career...I also set aside a portion of the grant to part-subsidise tickets to the gig for members of the young musicians' group I was part of, Standing Upright North Tyneside. This was, I hope, inspiring to the younger members of the group in attendance to highlight the progress that can be made as a musician."*

This award demonstrates the impact that a relatively small grant can have on an individual who is enabled to pursue their artistic ambitions. It is not just about the money, but also about someone believing in you. The fact that Katie was also motivated to 'pay it forward' for the next generation is something that the Community Foundation sees time and time again.

## How Lowick Heritage Group were helped to uncover the secrets of Hunting Hall

Lowick Heritage Group is a small volunteer-run organisation based in the local village hall in Northumberland. It aims to encourage, identify, preserve and promote the appreciation of the heritage of Lowick and the surrounding area. In November 2022, it received £4,389 from the Community Foundation's EDF Energy Renewables Barmoor Windfarm Community Benefit Fund to further the knowledge and research they had undertaken around an assumed Iron-Age enclosure at Hunting Hall.

*"Without the support from Barmoor Wind Farm and the Community Foundation, Lowick Heritage Group would not have been able to carry out the Archaeological Dig at Hunting Hall. It has proven to be an extremely important heritage site which is not listed. For a local group of volunteers to have discovered so much evidence including human bones and teeth is really exciting and important. As a group we have been delighted to welcome new visitors to the site this year and it has been important for us to give a knowledgeable tour on site so that people understand the importance of what we are doing."*

One member gave feedback:

*"The benefits of being able to volunteer with a small group like this are numerous. Just being able to be outside with like-minded people is food for my soul. My husband has recently been seriously ill and knowing that I could dip in and out of the sessions this year has been a tremendous support to my mental wellbeing. At no point did I ever feel that I needed to stay, or that I was letting anyone down. The feeling we have when we are with them is that we are all working together for a common goal. Everyone shares in everyone else's triumphs which just goes to underpin the feeling that we are one happy family."*

### **How Boxing Well used sport to assist asylum seekers and refugees in Blyth**

Boxing Well is a Community Amateur Sports Club based in Blyth, Northumberland. It aims to bring the benefits of non-contact boxing training to anyone suffering with mental health problems, to improve their mental and physical health. The organisation believes boxing also teaches people important skills they can use outside of the ring, for example perseverance, discipline, punctuality, respect and pride. In September 2021 Boxing Well received £5,000 from the Community Foundation's EDF Energy Blyth Offshore Demonstrator Wind Farm Community Benefit.

Boxing Well delivered daily sessions for 47 weeks of the year. It reported improved physical and mental health for all regular attendees as well as increased confidence. There were stress releasing benefits in the activity itself. The free, regular activity enabled a routine for the specific needs of this community, many of whom had been through trauma and were experiencing feelings of alienation, frustration and anger. Feedback from the organisation also describes improved English which has aided integration, with users forming genuine friendships with the existing members of the gym and the establishing of networks that offer both formal and informal support.

*"What has been achieved is a fantastic example of what can be done when communities come together and without this grant these relationships would simply not have been formed. The town would most certainly have been worse off without it."*

Given that Blyth is in one of the most disadvantaged parts of the country, and the potential for community unrest may be assumed to be high, this is a testament to the power of philanthropy to enable activities that support one group while bringing wider societal benefits.



# Philanthropy in action:

## North East Fund for the Arts and how collective giving can enable grassroots community projects across the region

The North East Fund for the Arts (NEFA) was established at the Community Foundation in 2012 with an initial donation of £22,200 that was match funded through Arts Council England's catalyst programme. Since then, the fund has steadily grown and now totals £150,000. Over the past 14 years it has made 75 grants totalling £95,000 enabling community organisations to drive activity they wanted to see.

NEFA is a collective fund which means that there are a range of donors who contribute. These might be one-off donations, such as individual fundraising initiatives, or larger, regular donations. The Fund also originally drew in several legacy pots, such as the Lady Betty and Sir Lawrence Martin Fund and the Pen and Palette Club Fund which were attracted by the Arts Council match. These now exist as separate culture funds making further grants with their own criteria. The overall impact is therefore much greater than the initial totals and has helped consolidate a model for philanthropic arts funding in the region.

For the fund's purposes, community means a group which shares characteristics (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender), background (e.g. refugees and asylum seekers), interests (creative writing) or geography. The emphasis is that the community members themselves articulate the sorts of activity they want to fulfill their own needs. This was in part a reaction to seeing applications from arts organisations seeking to work with communities where they could not demonstrate any buy in.

Funded activities have happened in all of the sub-regions of the North East engaging a wide range of communities. They have included the publication of a collection of women's stories and creative writing, 'In the Footsteps of Walker Women' in Newcastle, trauma-informed therapeutic art for people living in poverty in

North Tyneside, the creation of an art trail with refugees and asylum seekers at The Secret Garden, Sunderland and a drama group for visually impaired people in Durham. Grants have also gone to establish a monthly live literature cabaret in Stockton for diverse artists, a project to support eight young people with a range of learning difficulties or disabilities from across Gateshead to visit a theatre and an art gallery for the first time, an issue-based drama/performance club for girls in South Tyneside and eight weeks of dance and movement sessions for older people at risk of social isolation in north Northumberland.



# Appendix 1:

## Table of Indicators

The data below draws in several publicly available sources (links provided).

There are a few things to note. The participation survey is incredibly wide reaching in terms of its scope, but also in relation to definitions. For example, engagement in arts can include reading magazines or playing video games. This is worth flagging in relation to the high percentage figures.

In the case of national investment, this has been compiled using data from the three government arms-length bodies. This of course does not tell the complete story but is indicative for each sector. London has been included to underline the fact that national policy is still skewed to the capital.

Key area	Indicator	England	North East	South East	London	Date*
Participation - Arts	Physical engagement in the arts including reading, going to a theatre and playing video games	89%	89%	91%	-	2022-2023
Participation - Heritage	Visiting a place with a celebrated history including a city or town or a historic building	67%	66%	71%	-	
Participation - Museums and Galleries	Physical visits to a museum or gallery	33%	30%	34%	-	
National investment - Arts	ACE total investment across all programmes per head	£14	£13.43	£11.24	£32.52	2022-2023
National investment - Sport	Sport England investment per head	£15.07	£8.44	£9.05	£34.72	2022-2023
National investment - Heritage	Heritage Lottery Fund Investment per head	£3.95	£2.73	£1.49	£4.02	Jan 2022 to Oct 2023

\* Links to Source

# References

- i The term 'civil society' describes the connections between people with common interests coming together voluntarily to do things out of care for others, creativity or to pursue a cause. Charities and other types of community groups are the backbone of UK civil society organisations. For further discussion see: <https://civilsocietycommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/What-is-civil-society.pdf>

---
- ii <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-survey-2022-23-annual-publication/main-report-for-the-participation-survey-april-2022-to-march-2023#ITLH>

---
- iii <https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s129325/Lumiere%202019%20Evaluation.pdf#:~:text=2%20Lumiere%202019%20was%20the%20landmark%2010th%20edition,total%20economic%20impact%20valued%20at%20over%20%C2%A311.5%20million>

---
- iv [https://research.tees.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/25196693/Great\\_Place\\_Tees\\_Valley\\_Evaluation\\_Summary.pdf](https://research.tees.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/25196693/Great_Place_Tees_Valley_Evaluation_Summary.pdf)

---
- v <https://womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022-Reframing-Sport-for-Teenage-Girls-Tackling-Teenage-Disengagement.pdf>

---
- vi <https://womeninsport.org/>

---
- vii [https://assets.website-files.com/63989e164f27a3461de801f1/650959220c2ba45328a16390\\_MSFG\\_PW\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.website-files.com/63989e164f27a3461de801f1/650959220c2ba45328a16390_MSFG_PW_Report_FINAL.pdf)

---
- viii Hartworth, C. (2021) What stops disabled people going out, National Lottery Community Fund, Difference North East.

---
- ix <https://pec.ac.uk/news/national-statistics-on-the-creative-industries>

---
- x <https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/councils-reduce-library-and-culture-spend-by-almost-500m-since-2010-new-analysis-shows/>

---
- xi <https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/the-arts-in-schools>

---
- xii <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/durham-commission-creativity-and-education>

---
- xiii <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/research-and-data/contribution-arts-and-culture-industry-uk-economy>

---
- xiv <https://www.case4culture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NECP-analysis-NPO-MPM-funding-with-unfunded-NPO-data-140223-Crystallised.pdf>

---
- xv <https://ign.ams3.digitaloceanspaces.com/files/IGN-CultureCreativeIndustries-Report-Web-Feb-24.pdf> (page 2)

---
- xvi <https://www.fulwell73.com/single-post/major-sunderland-film-studio-plans-revealed>

---
- xvii <https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/business/creative-and-visitor-economy-growth-programme/>

---
- xviii <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2023/heritage-sector-in-england-and-its-impact-on-the-economy-2023/>

---
- xix [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6447ec19814c6600128d061d/Select\\_Committee\\_TRP\\_update.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6447ec19814c6600128d061d/Select_Committee_TRP_update.pdf)

---
- xx <https://destinationnortheastengland.co.uk/resource-hub/latest-tourism-data>

---

- xxi <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/heritage-and-society/attachment-historic-places/>
- 
- xxii <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.93.9.1546>
- 
- xxiii <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/in-your-area/north-east/heritage-at-risk-2023/>
- 
- xxiv <https://sramedia.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/2d77274e-af6d-4420-bdfb-da83c3e64772.pdf>
- 
- xxv <https://www.sportsthinktank.com/uploads/csjs-game-changer.pdf>
- 
- xxvi <https://www.sportsthinktank.com/uploads/csjs-game-changer.pdf>
- 
- xxvii <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/33369/documents/182735/default/>
- 
- xxviii <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Grassroots-participation-in-sport-and-physical-activity-Summary.pdf>
- 
- xxix <https://www.thefa.com/news/2022/nov/08/inspiring-positive-change-women-girls-football-strategy-update-20220811>
- 
- xxx <https://www.sportengland.org/>
- 
- xxxi <https://activelives.sportengland.org/Result?viewStatId=2>
- 
- xxxii <https://sported.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Pulse-October-2023-UK-Final.pdf>
- 
- xxxiii [https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/004/568/Activity\\_Alliance\\_Annual\\_Survey\\_2022-23\\_Executive\\_Summary\\_original.pdf?1686310867](https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/004/568/Activity_Alliance_Annual_Survey_2022-23_Executive_Summary_original.pdf?1686310867)
-

# Acknowledgements

This report was researched and written by Jo Cundall, Senior Advisor, Culture at the Community Foundation. It was designed by Lisa Kirkbride.

Our Vital Signs work is generously supported by Newcastle Building Society.

The Community Foundation is grateful for the time and expertise given by our Vital Signs North East editorial group. The group comprises:

Matt Bratton – CBI

Professor Tony Chapman – St Chad’s College, Durham University

Ngozi Lyn Cole – freelance consultant

Jo Curry MBE – Sir James Knott Trust

Dr Christopher Hartworth – Barefoot Research/Difference NE

Claire Malcom MBE – New Writing North and trustee of the Community Foundation

While the group advises on data sources, analysis and findings, the Community Foundation has overall editorial responsibility. The content and findings of our Vital Signs reports reflect the Community Foundation’s conclusions not the individual views of editorial group members or of Newcastle Building Society.

## Let’s talk

We hope that this report will inspire more of you to give to causes that help foster the North East’s unique culture. You can help inform our work on this and the other Vital Signs themes by completing the Vital Signs North East 2024 questionnaire. Just visit [www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns](http://www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns) or scan the QR code below.

If you would like to discuss this report further, or what you could do to help, please contact us:

**Community Foundation serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland**

Philanthropy House  
Woodbine Road  
Gosforth  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE3 1DD

**Phone:** 0191 222 0945

**Email:** [general@communityfoundation.org.uk](mailto:general@communityfoundation.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns](http://www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns)

Registered Charity No. 700510 Limited Company No. 227308

**Photo credits:** Boxing Well, Gilbert Johnson Photography, Lowick Heritage Group, Mortal Fools, Moving Parts Arts and Sunderland Samba FC.

