



London Borough of Culture 2025

Impact Report

**WELCOME TO
WANDSWORTH**
London Borough of Culture



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MAYOR OF LONDON

London Borough of Culture is a Mayor of London initiative.

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Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Foreword

Sir Sadiq Khan
The Mayor of London

Few cities on earth can rival London for culture. Our creative energy pulses through our city, and in many ways, is what makes London, London. Our music, theatre, fashion, film and art attract millions of visitors to our capital each year and generate £64 billion for our economy. But of course, their value goes far beyond pounds and pence. Culture brings an enormous amount of joy and colour to our lives – offering us the chance to discover new passions and talents, find like-minded communities and celebrate who we are.

We know the importance of culture. Yet, too often, our capital's incredible cultural offering hasn't been accessible to all Londoners. Enjoying culture, or having the chance to pursue a creative career, shouldn't be the preserve of a privileged few. Culture must be for everyone.

That's why, almost ten years ago, I created the London Borough of Culture with a simple ambition: to bring culture to the doorstep of every Londoner. Since then, we've reached over three million Londoners across our city, enlisted the help of more than 5,000 artistic partners and created tens of thousands of exciting opportunities for young people to share in our cultural riches. Our work has acted as a catalyst for creativity, bringing boroughs and communities together and serving as a springboard for local cultural life.

This year in Wandsworth has been no exception. As a lifelong Tooting resident, I may be biased, but the last twelve months have shown our borough – and our capital – at its very best: diverse, creative and overflowing with community spirit. More than 1,200 events took place across



the borough, made possible by over a thousand committed volunteers and enjoyed by nearly half a million people. 89 educational settings, including all primary and secondary schools, as well as hospital schools, sixth forms and pupil referral units got involved, with an astonishing 48,500+ children and young people taking part in cultural activities.

Wandsworth's London Borough of Culture was packed with unforgettable moments: Strictly Wandsworth brought together 20 local dance organisations and 150 dancers in a spectacular celebration of movement; Wandsworth Arts Fringe showcased the borough's extraordinary home-grown talent; Battersea Park welcomed the one and only Jools Holland; the iconic Clapham Grand celebrated 125 years; and Liberty Festival put disability-led art and culture centre stage.

My huge thanks go to Wandsworth Council, our artists, schools, community groups and volunteers – and above all, to the residents who embraced this year with such enthusiasm.

Wandsworth's year as London Borough of Culture may be ending, but its legacy will be felt for years to come – in the doors opened, the connections made and the imaginations awakened. Most importantly, it's shown a new generation of Londoners that culture isn't something distant or out of reach, it's right here on their doorstep, and it belongs to all of us. I look forward to many more years of celebrating our city's fantastic culture, as we seek to build a better, fairer and more prosperous London for everyone.

Foreword

Councillor Robert Morritt
Leader of Wandsworth Council



Wandsworth's year as the London Borough of Culture has been a real showcase for our community. Since becoming Leader of the Council earlier this year, I've realised that what Wandsworth does best is not glitzy displays but coming together as a community and getting on with the job of being a great place to live and raise a family.

From our very first major event – Strictly Wandsworth hosted by Oti Mabuse – Wandsworth focused on delivering brilliant events with local people at their heart. As well as big names, Strictly Wandsworth featured hundreds of local dancers and a mass dance finale that everyone could take part in. What followed was a programme of more than 1,200 events, activities and projects, celebrating our residents and communities and demonstrating the power of art and culture to bring us together. Over half a million people attended a live event during the year, and almost 50,000 children and young people had the chance to take part through our schools and young people's programmes.

The year ended with an incredible day at Battersea Power Station headlined by Basement Jaxx, featuring hundreds of local people. It showed how, working with our cultural sector, key partners and, most importantly, local people, Wandsworth is a force to be reckoned with.

We're busy delivering homes and attracting the investment that will bring jobs and opportunities. We know that culture, in its broadest sense, is central to how we shape the growth of our borough so that it becomes an integral part of our residents' lives. This report shows the positive impact of our year as London Borough of Culture on our residents, including projects to support health and wellbeing, and opportunities and internships for young people.

Wandsworth has a rich heritage and a bright future thanks to all those who have and will live here. I want to thank everyone who organised an event or volunteered to help run or take part in one. If you came along and enjoyed what Wandsworth has to offer, thank you.



Welcome to Wandsworth

April 2025 – March 2026

Welcome to Wandsworth was our year as the Mayor's London Borough of Culture, a year where culture sparked joy, and made us feel happier, healthier and more connected to each other.

We brought people together to enjoy the rich mix of traditions, festivals, food, and arts that make our borough so special. Our London Borough of Culture year was about creating something we were all proud of and building connections to last well into the future.

Our year set out to be a catalyst for change. We wanted to harness the incredible power of culture to:

Improve health and wellbeing

We set out to supercharge health and happiness by demonstrating the power of arts and culture to bring people together. From choirs and dance classes to volunteering opportunities, the programme helped residents experience the joy, connection and wellbeing benefits that come from taking part in shared creative activities.

Connect our communities

Co-created with local people, artists and organisations, the programme gave residents the chance to shape a year of cultural activity that reflected their interests and communities. It helped strengthen local connections, foster new relationships and create lasting memories across the borough.

Champion creative talent and ambition

Known for its vibrant and diverse communities, Wandsworth is home to a rich cultural heritage and a wealth of iconic creative organisations and spaces. Welcome to Wandsworth showcased the borough as a hub of creative energy that is lighting up London, creating opportunities for local talent to develop, thrive and shine on both national and international stages.

Make culture in Wandsworth accessible to everyone

Welcome to Wandsworth embedded creativity into everyday life, transforming neighbourhoods, streets and housing estates into spaces for cultural participation. Through free events and subsidised ticketing, the programme removed barriers to access, enabling more residents to experience the benefits of arts and culture.



Read our full Evaluation,
Learning & Impact
Reports here:



Our Year in Numbers

Scale and reach

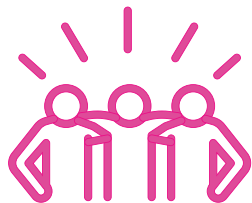


517,916
audiences and
participants
(in-person)

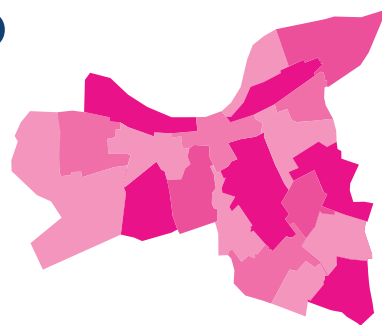
134,210
digital
engagements



3,020
artistic
partners



1,243
activities or
events
delivered,
covering all
wards in the
borough



89 educational settings, including all state primary and secondary schools, as well as some sixth forms, hospital schools, private schools, infant schools and both pupil referral units



£51.1m
in social value
generated



Over **£9.4m** spent locally
by audiences

48,593
children and
young people
engaged in and out of school



8.34m+
Public artwork views



1,084 volunteers



18 Local Champions

Impact



891 creatives
took part in free
professional
development
opportunities

97% of audience
members said their
access needs had
been met



91% rated
good/very good
experience



92% of participants and **86%** of audiences said London Borough of Culture activities had a positive effect on their sense of wellbeing



Audiences reflected the borough's population, with **37%** of audiences identifying as Global Majority

47% of audience were local residents
53% were visitors from outside Wandsworth

90 artists and creative businesses benefitted from one-to-one business support through the Re:Create programme



562 media mentions, including coverage in The Times, The Evening Standard, BBC London TV and Radio, ITV News, TimeOut London, and BBC Breakfast

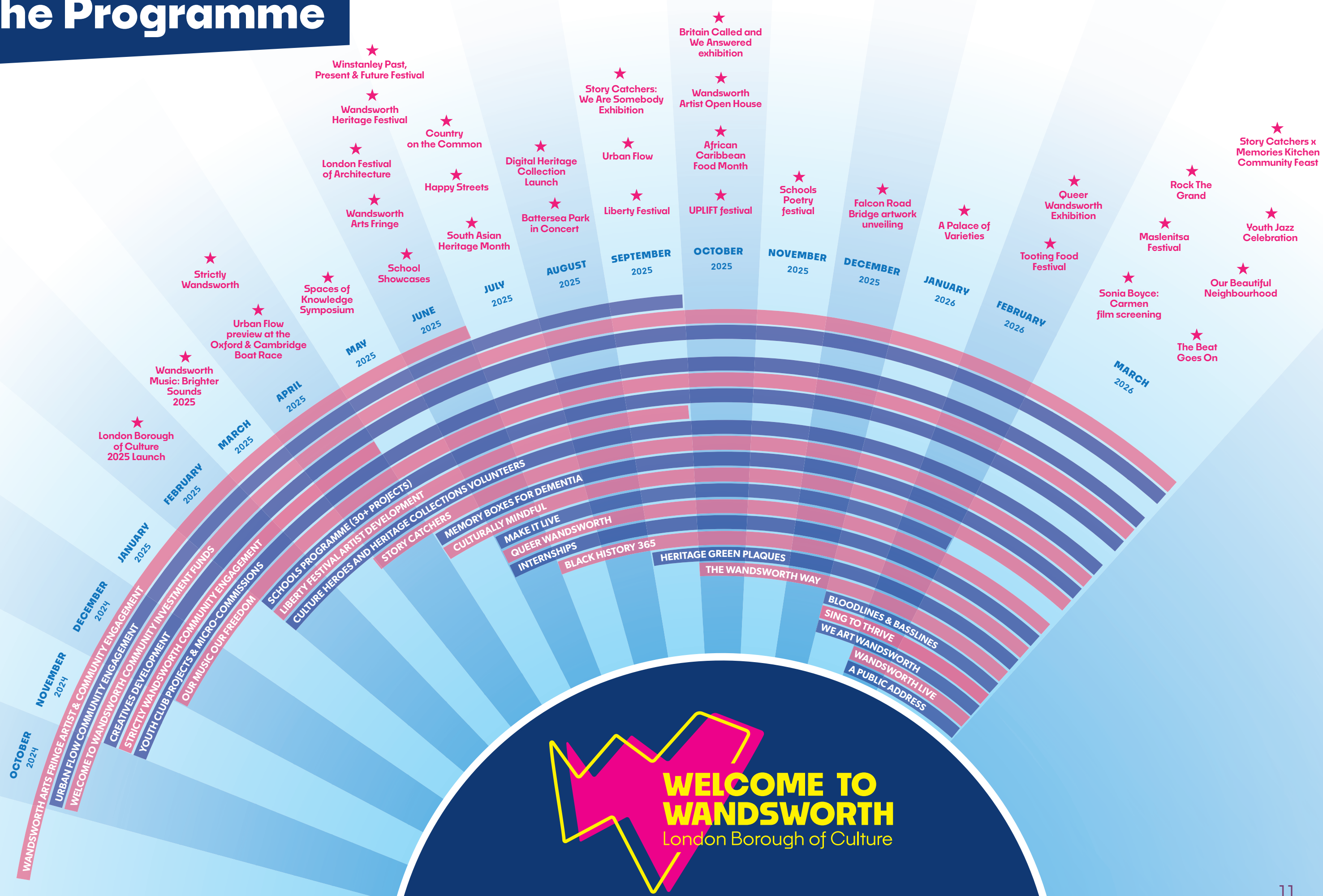
93% of participants agreed that the activity or event had enhanced their sense of community in Wandsworth



90% of participants said that it had helped them to feel connected to people in their community



The Programme



Our Residents and Visitors

We wanted Welcome to Wandsworth to be an invitation to come and experience the best of culture in Wandsworth, a year of celebration to shine a light on the many local and global influences that make our borough so special.

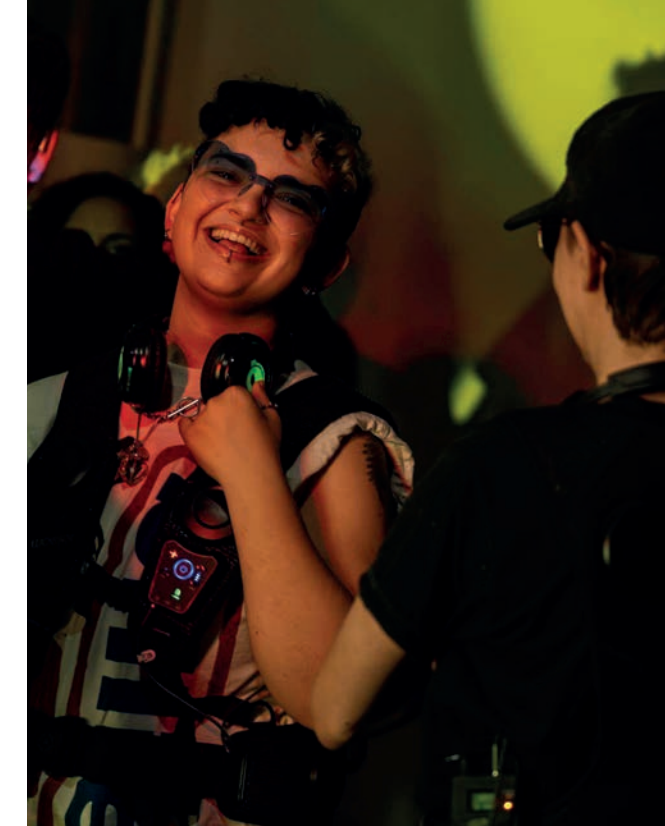
We wanted to showcase the powerful mix of traditional and modern culture shaped by our residents and, most importantly, invite everyone to enjoy it.

People did not pass up the opportunity: in total, 517,916 adults and 48,593 young people engaged with our live programme.

Over the year, we delivered **1,243 events**. This report is not able to cover all of them, so we have focused on a handful of case studies to indicate the breadth of the programme.

Flagship events including **Strictly Wandsworth**, **Wandsworth Arts Fringe**, **Country on the Common**, **Battersea Park in Concert** and **The Beat Goes On** brought thousands of people together, attracting diverse audiences from across the borough, London and beyond. Major exhibitions such as **Wandsworth Artists' Open House**, **Our Beautiful Neighbourhood**, **Story Catchers**, **Dame Sonia Boyce's Carmen**, **We Are Somebody** and the **Queer Wandsworth** exhibition inspired significant public engagement, while themed celebrations including **South Asian Heritage Month** and **African Caribbean Food Month** created opportunities for communities to come together through culture, heritage and shared experiences.

The celebration extended beyond in-person events. Digital projects, including the **Our Music Our Freedom** podcast series, **The Wandsworth Way**, a 40-episode community radio drama written by emerging local writers and performed by a community cast, alongside **Strictly Wandsworth** online tutorials and other digital content, reached over **134,210 people**.

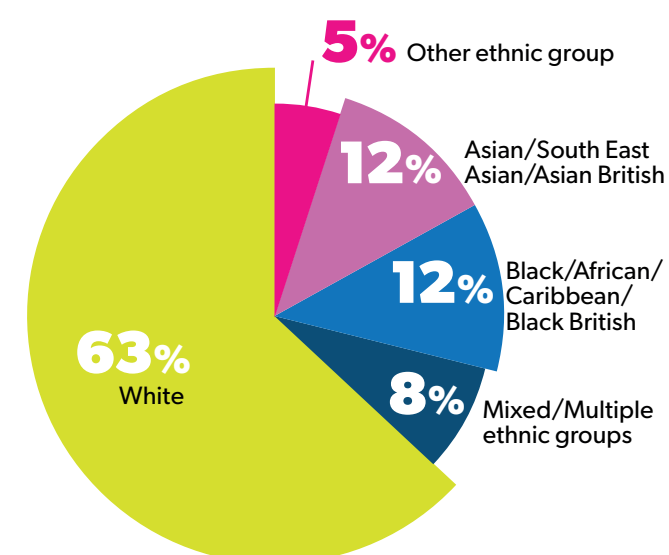


The year also saw a number of artworks (both temporary and permanent) installed in the public realm, which had at least **8,346,783 views**.

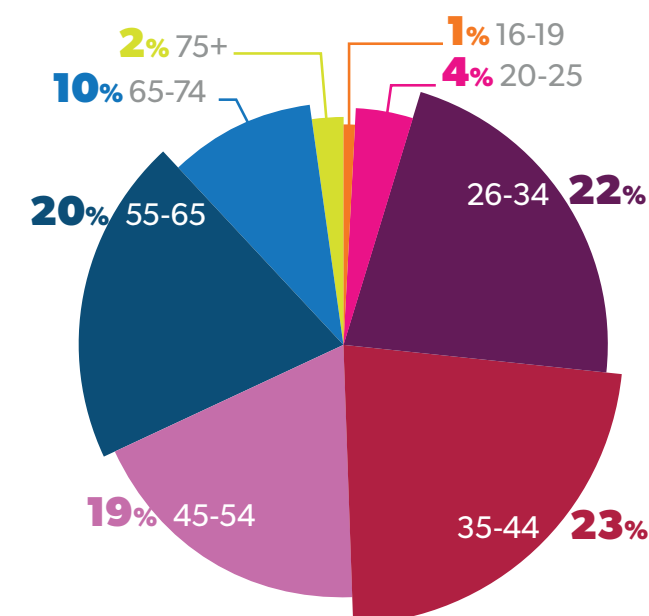
Permanent artworks such as the **Falcon Road Bridge** and the numerous murals created throughout the year will continue to be enjoyed by residents and visitors going forward, while the temporary artworks helped draw footfall to our shopping centres and high streets.

The programme attracted audiences from a wide range of ages and cultural backgrounds across Wandsworth, London, and beyond.

Ethnic profile of audiences



Audience age profile





The Audience Experience

Welcome to Wandsworth gave residents the chance to enjoy quality cultural experiences right on their doorstep.

From performances and exhibitions to workshops and community events, audiences responded overwhelmingly positively.

91% rated their experience as 'very good' or 'good'.

Our audiences told us they valued the chance to get out, connect with others and highlighted the importance of making quality arts and culture local, accessible and welcoming to all.

Visitors highlighted the **joy of spending quality time** with friends, children and wider family, and seeing loved ones happy and engaged. Many also enjoyed the chance to **try something new** – from discovering new art forms and attending performances in unfamiliar venues, to exploring different cultures, creative activities and workshops.



Over 50% of London Borough of Culture audiences attended a new kind of activity or event for the first time.

“As a young South Londoner, it’s really amazing to not have to travel 1.5 hours and spend £10 on the tube to engage in art and music events.”

Audience member, Bloodlines and Basslines





"It was good to be in a space where bi/pan people were centred and celebrated rather than dismissed or fetishized."
"Fantastic to have such positive energy, community spirit. Great talent on stage and felt very inclusive, connected. Great to see positive engagement from allies and general public."

Audience feedback, CaBiRet at Wandsworth Arts Fringe 2025

Celebrating the Diversity of Our Borough

Through programming such as Black History 365, African Caribbean Food Month, CelebrASIA, Eid celebrations, South Asian Heritage Month and Liberty Festival, people saw their cultures, identities and lived experiences reflected in the borough's cultural offer and in mainstream cultural spaces.

37% of audiences across the year identified as being from a Global Majority ethnic background.

22% identified as LGBTQIA+.

These events were about more than cultural participation. They were opportunities to connect, celebrate identity and feel a genuine sense of belonging. Audiences spoke of feeling seen, welcomed and included in spaces that embraced and celebrated the diversity that makes Wandsworth such a vibrant borough.





"This event got me out of the house, even though it was a struggle to leave home. I enjoyed moving my body, getting some fresh air, spending quality time with my daughter, and it made me feel less stressed and isolated.

We had a lovely day out"

Audience member, The Beat Goes On



The Feel-good Factor

Even a single cultural experience can make a meaningful difference to how people feel, creating moments of joy, connection and inspiration, increasing happiness, reducing stress, feeling uplifted and building social connection.

"I'm going through a difficult time so just to get out right now and attend something I love was a huge boost."

Audience member, Rosie Jones Comedy

86% of audiences agreed that London Borough of Culture events had a positive impact on their sense of wellbeing.



Sing to Thrive

Research consistently shows that singing is one of the most powerful activities for improving both physical and mental health.

Sing to Thrive built on this by commissioning two composers to create two original songs. While one composer worked with existing local choirs, culminating in a joint performance of the specially composed song "Sing as One" at the finale event, the other focused on community groups and underrepresented settings to promote singing as a tool for wellbeing, connection and creativity.

This case study focuses on this community-focused strand of the programme.

Aga Serugo Lugo, the composer chosen to work in community settings, employed an approach that was deeply participatory. His brief was "to, in conjunction with various community groups, write a song celebrating both the joy of singing, and – in the making of it – the wellbeing benefits of singing. But also celebrating Wandsworth Borough and the creativity and their local experiences".

He worked across diverse settings, including care homes, SEND groups and intergenerational groups, ensuring that people who "don't necessarily get a huge amount of singing" were actively included. Residents in a care home identified 'connection' as a core idea. According to Aga,

"connection was a really, really, really important word both in terms of singing and also when they were talking about their sense of Wandsworth." This became the foundation of the song The Wandsworth Corner Shop, with contributions from groups shaping verses, melodies and style.

For Sparkle, an intergenerational group, participation aligned strongly with their mission of bringing younger and older people together for mutual benefit. According to group lead Emma Chisholm, the project was presented as "a song written by the people and for the people of Wandsworth and performed by the people of Wandsworth."

Singing fostered confidence, creativity and joy. By making singing playful and accessible, the project inspired participants to reconsider singing as an everyday activity. This approach helped highlight singing's wellbeing benefits, from improved mood and confidence to social connection. One participant observed: "I felt absolutely uplifted... because otherwise I'd be at home." Another added that "it's the wellbeing benefits. It's good to boost your mood and morale."



Aga observed powerful moments of personal growth, particularly in specialist settings. For instance, at one of the sessions delivered with The Baked Bean Charity, a Wandsworth-based performing arts organisation for adults with learning disabilities, one of the participants who was described as "often very shy stepped up and said something" thus, contributing a key lyric – "a really lovely addition." In another case, a group lead reported seeing participants, who are largely non-verbal, singing for the first time.

Within groups, the experience of singing together created bonds through shared memories, creativity or simple breathing exercises. As Aga commented, "that moment of just inhaling and exhaling at the same time with other people is the most bonding thing. Singing is an incredibly social and connecting activity." One of the choir leads involved added: "Social connection is a very important part of what we do. It's not just a choir, it's a support friendship group."

Knowing that other groups across Wandsworth were contributing to the same song created a sense of collective identity and pride, reinforcing social cohesion across the borough.

At a borough-wide level, the project also connected diverse groups who might not otherwise interact. Emma explained: "we are trying to create relationships where one didn't exist before - anything that we can do to link up, to show that we are the same, is a good thing."

CASE STUDY



Culturally Mindful: Creative Health, Community and Care

Culturally Mindful was a borough-wide creative health programme designed to support Global Majority communities through culturally relevant arts and wellbeing activities. Delivered by Global Majority artists and practitioners, the programme combined specialist training, co-design, artist residencies and ongoing support, embedding creativity within health and community settings. This case study focuses on the public programmes delivered through artists' residencies in local organisations.

At **Wandsworth Carers' Centre**, the programme offered unpaid carers a rare opportunity to step away from their caring responsibilities and focus on themselves. Through storytelling, visual arts, photography and zine-making, participants explored creativity in a supportive environment shaped by their own interests and experiences.

Staff observed a noticeable difference in participants' wellbeing, with carers often arriving stressed and exhausted but leaving calmer, more connected and energised.

The project also strengthened the organisation's confidence in delivering trauma-informed creative health activities and demonstrated how art can create conversations and connections that traditional services often struggle to reach.

At the **Royal Hospital for Neuro-Disability**, the residency introduced a longer-term approach to arts-based therapy. Rather than one-off workshops, patients took part in a structured eight-week programme, allowing them to build skills, confidence and relationships over time. Staff reported increased engagement as participants worked towards a shared creative outcome, while involving family members helped showcase the hospital's holistic approach to care.

One of the community participants, **Hajira Bibi**, a mother of four living in Roehampton, studied fashion and textiles at university, but hasn't returned to creativity since becoming a mother. She joined **Humarah Mohallah** ('Our Neighbourhood') – a Culturally Mindful programme based on the Alton Estate – as a way to step outside her routine, meet other women, and have a small pocket of time for her own wellbeing.

"At home, even my tea and my food usually get cold. I'm the last one on my list. But when I went to the sessions, they'll be serving you food, they'll be offering you snacks. It made me feel like I can also sit at the table and be fed by somebody else."

While years of parenting responsibilities meant that Hajira lacked time to engage with creativity, the project brought back fond memories and helped her reconnect with her identity as a creative. She also noticed a boost in mood after sessions, greater patience at home with her children, and a reduction in the guilt she felt about her caring responsibilities.

In the hospital setting, one participant with Guillain-Barré syndrome gradually rebuilt both confidence and physical strength through adapted creative activities, ultimately returning after discharge to see his work exhibited.

The programme also transformed the practice of participating artists. **Rebecca Olajide**, a paper-based artist considering stepping away from her work while on maternity leave, found renewed confidence and purpose through her residency. Working alongside clinical staff, she adapted her creative practice for patients with complex neurological conditions and helped create an exhibition celebrating participants' achievements. She described the programme's peer support, clinical supervision and emphasis on artists' professional value as vital to her development.

Culturally Mindful has created a lasting legacy. Host organisations are continuing to explore creative health approaches, artists and partners received funding to build on their residencies, and new toolkits, frameworks and delivery models are being developed. Together, these foundations will help ensure creative health remains an important part of wellbeing support in Wandsworth for years to come.



CASE STUDY



Memory Boxes for Dementia

Not all of the London Borough of Culture programme was about public celebration. Some of its greatest impact was felt in small groups, where residents gathered to share memories, stories and experiences. Memory Boxes for Dementia embodied Wandsworth's commitment to bringing together health, heritage and the arts, using local history as a powerful tool for wellbeing, connection and engagement.

During the London Borough of Culture year, Memory Boxes have been used to deliver sessions facilitated by community partners who work with people living with dementia and other forms of memory loss. Filled with objects from Wandsworth's past, the boxes aim to represent and spark memories of the shared experiences of Wandsworth residents.

During the project's first phase (November 2025 to February 2027), sessions are being delivered by a range of community partners. Collaboration between the Heritage Service and community organisations has been key to the Memory Boxes design and impact.

"What I've enjoyed...is the opportunity to come together with other organisations that are delivering similar work"
Tabea Leiss, Outreach Coordinator at Age UK Wandsworth.

For Sarah Goodall, Head of Elders Programme at Katherine Low Settlement in Battersea, working with the Wandsworth Heritage Service was **"definitely a winning factor"** in taking part in Memory Boxes **"because we know the amazing work they do there"**.

Each Memory Boxes session works differently, with facilitators shaping the experience around the needs of participants. At the Katherine Low Settlement, sessions include people with dementia and other forms of cognitive impairment as well as those without. Sarah noted that the contents of the Memory Boxes mean it's possible to **"support those with memory problems, as well as engage the whole of that cohort in integrated sessions that everyone could take part in"**. The diverse makeup of the groups led to participants engaging on equal terms, **"being really kind and supportive and listening"**. It also led to fun, with **"lots of laughter and carrying on... people giggling over things"**.

Overall, the sessions **"really lifted people's mood"** and participants **"always left feeling quite positive and wanting to know when the next session was"**.

Tabea Leiss commented that participants in Age UK Wandsworth sessions had similar experiences. The fact that Memory Boxes are designed around discussion and sharing means that **"people feel quite included really quickly"**, and the prompts and activity cards **"make newcomers and first-time participants more comfortable"** by removing the pressure to find a way into conversation. Accessibility has led to increased demand for the sessions. **"People really enjoy the project"** Tabea said, and **"they want more of it, they want it more frequently"**.

Inside each Memory Box is a carefully curated selection of objects, photographs and documents centred on a particular theme. The contents come from the 14,000+ items in the **Wandsworth Heritage Collection**. In storage since 2016, the Collection represents a physical and visual record of Wandsworth history stretching back for more than a century.

The local focus has proven to be a particular attraction for participants, and a key factor in the success of the project so far. Sometimes this leads to unexpected and joyful experiences. One participant in an Age UK Wandsworth session based on the 'Kitchen' Memory Box was surprised to recognise herself in one of the photographs, standing in her childhood kitchen. At a Katherine Low Settlement session, a participant discovered a school magazine in the 'School Days' Memory Box and shared memories of working in the same school in the 1960s when the magazine was created, including stories about the people and events depicted in it.

For those who have not lived in Wandsworth all their lives, Tabea pointed out that the nature of the themes mean that the Memory Boxes are grounded but not exclusive. **"If you've only moved here in the last 10 years, you will still be able to tell a story and relate"**. Whether participants in Memory Boxes sessions were born and raised in Wandsworth or are relatively new to the borough, the contents create a shared sense of Wandsworth's history and their place within it.

Memory Boxes may be carefully designed, but they have also become catalysts for creativity. Sarah laughed as she remembered a session in which participants became very excited talking about their favourite school dinners. That excitement has inspired a new project in which Katherine Low Settlement's 'Battersea Bites' project is being combined with the 'School Days' Memory Box to support new cook and eat sessions based on classic school meals.

Facilitators of a 'Going Out' Memory Box session at Age UK Wandsworth were inspired by the positive responses to experiment by adding to the box. Participants nominated songs to create a playlist for a night out, created imaginary characters based on the objects in the box, and handled fabric samples as a prompt to talk about how they liked to dress up for special occasions.

Expressiveness, sharing and playfulness make Memory Boxes for Dementia a particularly dynamic project. The creativity inspired by these characteristics also points the way for the remainder of the project, which is inspired by the London Borough of Culture programme.

Four new Memory Boxes launch in 2026, three of which are inspired by London Borough of Culture events and initiatives. An Afro-Caribbean box represents a continuation of the Story Catchers project; a Queer Wandsworth box contains objects donated by members of the Furzedown LGBTQ 50+ project and activities built on research for Queer Wandsworth; a South Asian box is being created by a community partner in Roehampton, bringing together aspects of Culturally Mindful and Memories Kitchen. Memory Boxes for Dementia is already having a positive impact on the wellbeing of people living with Dementia through sharing and reminiscence based on Wandsworth's heritage; and aims to continue to do so, involving local communities in making and sharing new memories together.





The People who Made it Happen: Celebrating our Participants

Our programme was built through creative engagement, co-creation and community involvement.

Major projects such as Strictly Wandsworth brought together 20 dance organisations and 150 dancers in a borough-wide collaborative project, while Urban Flow engaged community performers in an 11-month programme of workshops and rehearsals culminating in a large-scale public procession. Wandsworth Arts Fringe provided a year-long artist support programme as well as an ongoing outreach programme.

Liberty Festival, South Asian Heritage Month, African Caribbean Food Month and We Art Wandsworth, to name just a few, all combined performances with workshops, community-led activity and culturally specific participation opportunities that encouraged residents to actively contribute, celebrate identity and build social connections.

Creative health initiatives such as Culturally Mindful embedded artists within healthcare and community settings to support wellbeing through longer-term engagement, while the Story Catchers project trained young people in oral history techniques to collect older residents' stories about food and identity.

Our Participants

3/10 were aged **55** or over

17% were aged **16-25**

1/5 had a disability or long-term health condition

95% reported that their access needs had been met

41% identified as being from a Global Majority background

18% identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

92% reported a positive impact on their wellbeing

90% agreed that it had "helped them to feel connected to people in their community".

93% agreed that the activity or event had "enhanced their sense of community in Wandsworth"

CASE STUDY



Strictly Wandsworth

Strictly Wandsworth launched Wandsworth's London Borough of Culture year with its largest mass participation dance programme to date.

The project brought together 20 local dance organisations and around 150 dancers, spanning professional companies, community groups and dance schools, to create a 12-minute piece performed in Battersea Park in April 2025.

It combined a borough wide 'learn the dance' digital offer with in-person rehearsals and a mass performance designed to be accessible across ages, abilities and settings.

Jenna Lee, co-artistic director of London Children's Ballet and the producer of Strictly Wandsworth, emphasised its role in connecting the borough's fragmented dance sector. As the co-director of a key cultural tenant in the borough, Jenna was approached to produce Strictly Wandsworth. She worked alongside specialist choreographer and mass-movement expert Jeanefer Jean-Charles. For Jenna, this collaboration was professionally transformative, deepening her understanding of leadership and consolidating a people first approach to creative work.

The project shaped her view that effective leadership in this context must be grounded in empathy and flexibility, particularly when many contributors are volunteering out of pride and commitment to place, and when artistic ambition has to sit alongside care, respect and clear communication.

Jenna's approach was based on a simple idea: dance should be accessible to everyone. By encouraging people of different ages and abilities to perform the same movements, whether standing or seated, she showed that "we can all do it."

This approach made Strictly Wandsworth much more than a performance. It brought people together from across the borough, including groups who had never previously worked with London Children's Ballet. Participants helped shape the choreography and saw their own dance styles, experiences and identities reflected in the final piece, creating a strong sense of pride, ownership and belonging across Wandsworth's dance community.

CASE STUDY



Another Community all of its own: Volunteering with London Borough of Culture

At the heart of Welcome to Wandsworth was a remarkable group of volunteers known as the **Culture Heroes**. Supporting events, festivals and activities across the year, they helped bring the London Borough of Culture programme to life while building connections across the borough.

Our team of 491 amazing Cultural Heroes were a vital part of delivering London Borough of Culture and created unforgettable moments through family and community volunteering. Our volunteers were also joined by 593 volunteers from partner organisations, and together they contributed at least 4,853 hours across events and activities borough-wide.

The programme attracted a diverse and inclusive volunteer community. While most volunteers were aged **25-54 (62%)**, a quarter were **over 55** and **12% were aged 16-24**. The group was **71% female**, with **45% coming from Global Majority backgrounds**. Although many lived in Wandsworth, volunteers also travelled from across London to take part.

But the real story lies beyond the numbers. As one volunteer described it, the programme became **"another community all of its own."**

For many, volunteering was about giving back.

One volunteer, who had lived in the borough for over 40 years, saw the programme as a chance to support something she cared deeply about: bringing people together.

Some stories were more personal. A resident who had stepped away from work to care for a family member found volunteering a way to rebuild direction and confidence. Another, newly retired, saw it as a way to avoid **"sitting at home"** and instead stay active and engaged. Another first encountered the programme as an attendee of the Strictly Wandsworth event, saw volunteers in action, and was inspired to sign up.

Importantly, the accessibility and flexibility of the programme encouraged participation: through a flexible, mission-based model, volunteers could sign up to individual events that suited their availability and interests. This meant people could take part on their own terms – whether for one event or many – thus removing common barriers to volunteering and broadening the pool of participants.

What volunteers got back was often unexpected. There were memorable moments – meeting new people, stepping into unfamiliar places, even being unexpectedly hugged by a celebrity chef at an event. But more often, it was the quieter impact that stayed with people.

One volunteer described her feeling of **"good positive exhaustion"** after a long shift, giving her a sense that she had contributed something meaningful. Another volunteer explained how, after bereavement, handing out leaflets and giving directions – **"small things"** – helped rebuild confidence and added to their CV as they looked for work.

Volunteers experienced events they might not otherwise attend – ranging from Afro-Caribbean food festivals to theatre and music performances – while discovering new parts of the borough. This broadened their understanding of Wandsworth's diversity and strengthened their connection to the borough.

But perhaps most powerful were the connections. Volunteers described working alongside people they would never normally meet: **"We spent the whole day together... we wouldn't have been brought in contact otherwise."**

Across generations and backgrounds, these shared experiences created a sense of belonging. As one volunteer reflected, it felt like **"a celebration of our community and communities."**

Volunteers supported practical operations such as welcoming visitors, managing crowds, distributing materials, and assisting with event logistics. Their presence enabled events to run smoothly at scale.

Beyond logistics, volunteers embodied the 'human' side of the events: they were the first people attendees met, the ones answering questions, calming nerves, or simply offering a smile. Volunteers described how members of the public would stop to say thank you, often recognising them instantly in their bright shirts.

Volunteers also helped shape the public perception of the events and of Wandsworth Council. Volunteer involvement helped show "the soft side of the council, rather than the bit that sends you the bill," and reinforced the programme's identity as something created with the community, not just for it.

"The council got to show how you can engage this sort of army of volunteers which knits your borough together."

The programme has created a diverse, motivated group of residents who are confident, connected, and willing to get involved in local programmes.



CASE STUDY

Local Champions

Our Local Champions initiative was a pioneering model within Wandsworth's London Borough of Culture. For the first time in Wandsworth, residents got directly involved in decision-making around cultural programming and funding.

Acting as a bridge between the council and local communities, our 18 Local Champions, aged from 15 to 87, brought lived experience, local knowledge and community insight into processes that would traditionally have been led by council officers and elected members.

"I was so excited and so proud when Wandsworth won the Borough of Culture. I really wanted to get involved."

Champions saw it as an opportunity to influence local decisions, champion underrepresented communities and give something back to the borough. Collectively, the group brought a wide range of experiences, from youth work and community organising to SEND advocacy and grassroots volunteering.

For many Champions, the experience was personally transformative. Taking part in grant assessment panels and strategic discussions built confidence and introduced them to processes they had never been involved in before.

"It's been really interesting to see that grant making process and be involved in it."

Several participants spoke about gaining confidence in their ability to make decisions and contribute meaningfully, while others found the programme sparked their passion for advocacy and community leadership. **"I've taken quite a lot from it... it's slightly reignited the advocate in me. I've dusted off the soapbox, I'll probably be climbing up on it a few times now! I've enjoyed playing that role and representing my borough, and my creative community, and hope to do more of it."**

The benefits extended beyond skills and personal development, boosting wellbeing, and offering the chance to attend events, meet new people and explore new interests. **"For me, it's been a nice distraction from being a parent. Caring for children is very hard work. Having the opportunity to go to different events, which I wouldn't normally go to, has been a nice distraction and helped with wellbeing."**

Many Champions also formed lasting friendships and connections, creating a sense of belonging among people from different backgrounds, neighbourhoods and generations.



Champions became ambassadors for the programme, encouraging friends, family and colleagues to attend events and explore new opportunities across the borough. In doing so, they helped widen participation and connect residents with activities and services they may never have discovered otherwise. **"Being able to help my children grow within the borough and help them explore new hobbies and get them off the internet and all those positives this has brought to my family."**

Perhaps the programme's greatest strength was the insight Champions brought into decision-making. Their understanding of local communities helped identify gaps, challenge assumptions and ensure activities reflected the realities of life across Wandsworth. **"We know what our borough needs."**

Their contribution was recognised by both officers and elected members, who valued the Champions' ability to highlight communities or perspectives that might otherwise have been overlooked.

The programme also helped build trust. By involving residents directly in funding and programming discussions, decisions felt more transparent and community-led. **"It's your neighbours who decided where the grants went."**

The Local Champions programme demonstrated the value of sharing power with residents and showed how community voices can strengthen decision-making, improve inclusion and build stronger relationships between councils and the people they serve. **"It's been a fantastic year, and it's opened Wandsworth's eyes to the potential going forward."**



Our Young People

Some of our most ambitious targets for this year focussed on involving children and young people – and we exceeded them all. Throughout the year, we worked with 89 educational institutions, including primary, secondary, sixth forms, Pupil Referral Units and SEND schools and four of the borough's fee-paying schools.

Over 30 different school initiatives were delivered, catering to different age groups and artforms, including the borough-wide poetry programme and Schools Poetry Festival, author events and journalism programmes, school microgrants, school performance showcases, music therapy, and targeted SEND and specialist school activity. These activities often culminated in public exhibitions, performances and community events attended by wider audiences across the borough. Schools also participated in major borough-wide events including Strictly Wandsworth, where pupils learned choreography alongside community groups. In total, **26,946 children and young people** engaged in our programme **through schools**.

21,647 young people engaged with London Borough of Culture **outside of school** – through youth clubs, community centres, and through programmes such as UPLIFT Festival and London Borough of Culture Playwriting Competition for young people aged 14–19, under-5s library programmes, microgrants for youth clubs, Young Reporters, Young Producers, Rock the Grand, Youth Jazz Celebration, work experience placements, creative industry mentoring or as audiences at events.

In order to ensure that London Borough of Culture leaves a lasting legacy on younger residents' lives, programmes were delivered that spanned a number of weeks or months to enable young people to develop and enhance their skills and knowledge, as well as provide employment and

leadership opportunities. Over the course of the year, **2,827 young people** participated in these more **in-depth programmes** such as the media clubs, 6-month paid internships, Story Catchers, youth club dance programmes, youth theatre programmes and young producer schemes.

These projects helped children and young people to build confidence, develop skills and create opportunities for creative expression. Creative workshops, performances, and community events enabled young people to meet peers, make friends, and feel part of their local community.

Our London Borough of Culture programme created opportunities that many children and young people may not otherwise have accessed, and many expressed a strong desire for these opportunities to continue beyond the programme.

"I have had the opportunity to participate in many more cultural events than normal due to London Borough of Culture"

Young Person

Young people grew in confidence as a result of their involvement with London Borough of Culture projects. Through trying new activities and developing skills, they enhanced their self-esteem and pushed themselves to do something outside their comfort zone.

"It's given me a lot more confidence to participate in group discussions, as well as interview strangers. Has improved my fear of public speaking too."

Story Catcher



CASE STUDY



Our Beautiful Neighbourhood

Our Beautiful Neighbourhood, delivered in partnership with the Royal College of Art, invited over 1,300 children and young people from 47 primary, secondary and SEND schools to stop, look closer and reimagine the natural world around them.

What started with workshops in classrooms and school grounds grew into a borough-wide art trail stretching across Battersea Power Station, Putney Exchange, Southside Shopping Centre, Tooting Market and Wandsworth Town Hall. Along the way, pupils, teachers and artists discovered that nature was not somewhere distant – it was already woven into their everyday lives.

Co-lead artist Vanessa Rolf reflected, **"The children were talking about how they'd never thought that anything lived in that space because usually they're playing and focused on each other."** These moments of observation encouraged children to slow down, connect with nature and find joy in noticing.

The journey culminated in a public celebration as children's artwork was displayed across streets, shopping centres and community spaces throughout Wandsworth.

Artists recalled **"gasps of excitement"** when pupils discovered their work would be exhibited, and for many families, visiting the displays became a moment of enormous pride. Bushra Oakley, Arts Lead at John Burns Primary School, described children arriving at Battersea Power Station and immediately searching for their banners: **"They were super, super proud."** Crucially, every child's work was included. As Hannah Coulson, co-lead artist, explained, **"Absolutely everything that everybody made was included."** This commitment to inclusion ensured every participant had a place in the project.



CASE STUDY

Story Catchers

What happens when young people are trusted to become guardians of local history?

Story Catchers answered that question by bringing together 14 young people with older residents from Global Majority backgrounds across Wandsworth to collect, preserve and celebrate stories that might otherwise have been lost.

Trained as oral historians by On the Record CIC, the Story Catchers recorded the experiences of 26 community members, exploring themes of migration, identity, belonging and food. Their work culminated in the **We Are Somebody** exhibition, the **Memories Kitchen booklet** and a **community feast**, while creating a permanent archive for future generations.

Through paid training and hands-on experience, the Story Catchers developed skills in interviewing, research, storytelling and public speaking, while gaining confidence and exploring new career possibilities.

By documenting the voices and experiences of communities often underrepresented in official histories, Story Catchers helped build a richer and more inclusive picture of Wandsworth.

As participant Elliot Murray reflected, the project was about capturing the experiences of people who have **"been in the area for ages, like longer than I think any of us have been alive"** and who have witnessed the borough change over time.

Elders shared memories, traditions and life experiences, while young people gained fresh perspectives on the communities around them. For Story Catcher Sushmita Srivastava, these encounters became one of the project's most valuable lessons:

"Meeting people from different backgrounds and communities gives you a different eye to how people have seen life."

Those conversations were transformed into something tangible through the Memories Kitchen booklet, where recipes from Afghanistan, Jamaica, India, Nigeria, Pakistan and beyond sat alongside the personal stories that inspired them.

The project also created new connections across generations and communities. The community feast brought interviewees, participants and residents together around a shared table, celebrating both food and storytelling.



For Sushmita, who had recently moved to London, the experience helped create a sense of community:

"I think I've also developed a sense of belonging because since I was not born here, I just moved here for my education. Meeting this group, even the Story Catchers and the facilitator, it was a great experience overall."

In preserving the memories of one generation, Story Catchers inspired another, creating a living legacy of connection, representation and belonging.

"Interviewing participants and documenting their stories for the archive felt purposeful... it felt grounding to contribute to something that preserved people's histories within the borough."



CASE STUDY

The Internship Programme: Putting Wandsworth's Young Talent to Work

How a pioneering paid internship scheme has opened the doors of Wandsworth's arts world to the young people who live here and quietly transformed the organisations that welcomed them in.

On a quiet Thursday morning at St George's Hospital in Tooting, Sadie, a 25-year-old artist from Wandsworth, is straying from her usual routine. She is helping to run a staff choir for NHS workers. A week earlier, she was reviewing applications for arts grants.

Next week, she will be liaising with a resident musician about his ward visits. This, she says, is a week in the life of a Wandsworth intern.

For Sadie, who was born and raised in the borough before spending three years working freelance in Birmingham's arts scene, the timing felt almost too good to be true.

"I came back to London not being quite sure what I was going to do," she said. **"And then this was there."** She was placed with the arts team at St George's Hospital Charity, a world away from the gallery settings she had known, and has not looked back. Her manager, Grace Lindley, Arts Engagement Manager at the charity, was looking for additional capacity to deliver its London Borough of Culture projects. What she got was rather more than that. **"She was just a brilliant ambassador for the charity,"** Grace said.

Sadie was one of nine young Wandsworth residents who undertook a six-month paid placement across some of the borough's most celebrated cultural organisations including Battersea Arts Centre, Royal Academy of Dance, the Royal College of Art, Theatre503, London Children's Ballet, Chocolate Films, St George's Hospital Charity, Putney Arts Theatre and On Da Beat.

9 Interns placed

6 Months full-time paid work

9 Placement organisations

2 Care leavers

The programme, which ran from September 2025 to March 2026, paid every intern at the London Living Wage. Out of the nine interns, two are care leavers. All interns were between 18 and 25 and, for each of them, this was their first professional role in the creative sector.

Libby, an intern at Putney Arts Theatre, said: **"My favourite part of the internship was getting to be creative every day. I enjoyed so many aspects of the internship but the underlying one was finally being in a position to be paid and encouraged to be creative – whether that was designing/ painting sets, or making props, impromptu fixing of props or discussing costumes and logistics. I loved it!"**

A few miles away, at the Grand Hall of the former Battersea Town Hall, Shanti was equally transformed by her placement. Born in Tooting and a lifelong Wandsworth resident, she found out about the scheme through a work coach who thought it sounded right for her. **"I had no idea what it was,"** she laughed, **"but I applied right away."**

She was placed in Battersea Arts Centre's Media and Communications team. Within weeks, she was attending weekly strategy meetings, contributing to campaign brainstorms for the Spring season, managing digital assets, and developing expertise in accessible content creation. For Shanti, this opportunity has provided a platform for refining her own practice and gaining exposure to the creative industry.

Iman, who was at the Royal College of Art, described a similar leap in both skills and horizons: **"I think the London Borough of Culture internship will be helpful for future roles, because the things I have learned during my time here has opened me up to another field that I hadn't considered before and it's set me up for the next step... All these different skills I've obtained, plus I have learnt what it means to work in an office environment and the culture around it."**

Layla El-Deeb, the Director of Marketing & Communications at Battersea Arts Centre and Shanti's line manager, was candid about why the sector needed a scheme like this. **"Teams across the board have shrunk since the pandemic,"** she said, **"and a lot of those entry-level roles just don't exist now."** The old culture of unpaid internships, which effectively locked out anyone without financial backing, is something she is glad to see the back of.

Shanti agreed that the placement has shifted her sense of what is possible. **"I've been more open to doing stuff I was a bit more closed off about before,"** she said. For Sadie, the internship cracked open an entirely new professional world. **"It really changed my perspective on the function that art can play in those spaces,"** she reflected. She has decided she wants to return to arts and healthcare - a field she had never previously considered.



A foot in the door

Across all nine placements, there is a pattern – young people finding, often for the first time, that the creative industries are somewhere they genuinely belong. Joshua, an intern at Chocolate Films, said the cohort experience days were key to the success of the programme: **"One of the reasons I wanted this internship was to get more familiarised with other creative practices and the experience days allowed me to get a small amount of insight in many creative industries; what considerations they had for practicality, audiences, and artistry. Additionally, it felt more like I was a part of a community as it meant I could get to know the other interns more and feel like there were others going through similar things as me."**

The simplicity of entry-level, paid, local internships turned out to be radical. Grace Lindley at St George's noted that the arts and health sector remains significantly underrepresented by people from Global Majority backgrounds. The scheme gave her organisation a meaningful way to act on its values. **"This was an opportunity for us to try to make a small difference within that"** she said.

As the placements drew to a close in Spring 2026, nine young Wandsworth residents left their placements with new skills, networks, and confidence. Two had their contracts extended within their host organisations, and one found full-time employment in another cultural organisation. For the organisations that hosted them, the experience has been equally enriching - an injection of energy, fresh ideas, and community connection during the borough's year as London Borough of Culture.



Our Artists and Creatives

Welcome to Wandsworth put artists and creatives at the heart of our London Borough of Culture year. Together, they helped bring ambitious projects to life across dance, music, theatre, visual arts and more, showcasing the imagination, talent and energy that make Wandsworth such a vibrant place to live and create.

One of the programme's biggest achievements was the scale of creative participation. Across the year, we worked with **3,020 artistic partners**, exceeding our target of 2,552 and demonstrating the strength of Wandsworth's cultural network and appetite for collaboration.

The programme created opportunities for artists and producers to develop new skills, gain professional experience and grow their confidence. Many took on leadership roles, managed budgets, coordinated large-scale events and worked with communities in new ways. For some, it was their first experience delivering complex community-led projects.

"My skills definitely developed as a result of organising this activity. Coordinating the Windrush Tea Party strengthened my leadership, communication and organisational skills, and helped me to think quickly on my feet when challenges arose."

Organiser, Windrush Tea Party at STORM Family Centre, July 2025 (a Black History 365 project)

Alongside hands-on experience, we invested in training and business support. More than **891 freelance creatives** took part in professional development opportunities, including marketing, fundraising and mentoring. Through the Wandsworth Re:Create programme, over **170 local creatives** built new networks, while **90 artists and creative businesses** received tailored one-to-one support.

"My mentor approached my business with a totally new perspective, giving me ideas I never would have thought of alone." **Artist, Re:Create**

Artists also received specialist training to support their work with different communities, including Dementia Awareness and Mental Health Awareness training. These opportunities strengthened skills in facilitation, outreach and co-creation, helping artists work more confidently with young people, community groups and first-time participants.

We were particularly committed to supporting the next generation of creative talent. Through internships, young producer programmes, journalism projects, oral history training and artist development schemes, local young people gained practical experience, mentoring and paid opportunities to develop their careers.



"It's been an eye-opening experience that's helped me grow both creatively and professionally. Paid opportunities like this are rare, so gaining hands-on experience in something I'm passionate about is amazing."

Emerging artist, Internship Programme

Welcome to Wandsworth encouraged artists to experiment, innovate and collaborate. **Nearly half worked in new spaces**, while **many developed new partnerships and creative approaches**. Major projects such as Strictly Wandsworth, Urban Flow, Liberty Festival and Culturally Mindful brought together professional artists, community participants, schools and cultural organisations to create work that could not have happened otherwise.

The impact was felt professionally and personally. **98% of artists said they enjoyed taking part**, and the same proportion felt their projects had positively affected the wellbeing of audiences and participants.

"The artists feel recognised and appreciated in Wandsworth. It strengthens the artists' connection with the borough."

Producer & Artist, Museum Interventions

The programme also reflected the diversity of Wandsworth's creative community. Survey responses showed that 38% of participating artists were from Global Majority backgrounds, one-third identified as LGBTQIA+, and 45% reported having a disability or long-term health condition. Across all events, 92% of artists said their access needs were met.

By creating opportunities, building skills and fostering collaboration, Welcome to Wandsworth has helped strengthen the borough's creative community and left a lasting legacy for artists, organisations and future generations.

CASE STUDY

The Wandsworth Way

The Wandsworth Way was a 40-episode weekly radio drama produced in partnership with Riverside Radio, Theatre503 and a community cast and crew of over 115 people. Structured around the journeys of a returning novelist and a local cab driver, the series created an audio portrait of the borough that explored memory, identity and the evolving meaning of home.

For many creatives involved, this was a first experience of audio drama, and it proved transformative for their artistic confidence. For one community writer, Kevin Ung, the project provided an opportunity to translate his own experiences of Ernest Bevin College, Tooting and wider Wandsworth into the episodes: **"I felt like I could take risks with the script and that someone would be there to just steer me in the right direction."**

The project had a positive impact on participants' wellbeing within the professional environment. Interviewees consistently described recording days as energising, mood lifting and socially meaningful. One observed that anyone who arrived feeling a little bit down was feeling on a high by the end and almost every participant asking **"what next?"** as the project neared completion. One actor called her day **"absolutely fantastic"** saying she made friends and left

with new contacts she could talk to and reach out to; this as a recent Canadian arrival, made her feel notably more community-minded. Another participant described it as one of the greatest experiences of his professional life, noting the rare enthusiasm of a team where everyone arrived eager to find out what was happening next. Several participants emphasised how enjoyable it was to spend evenings and weekends doing something a bit different with neighbours, rather than being alone at home.

The Wandsworth Way's impact was also civic. It enabled people who might never otherwise have met to work side by side on a shared cultural project. One participant explained that the team made a **"systematic effort"** to bring in people **"from across every postcode in the borough"**, and that the result was a cast and crew that reflected **"the broad spectrum of nationalities and races and religions"** in Wandsworth. This was echoed by other participants, who described workshops and recording days filled with **"different ages, lots of different accents"**, people born and bred in Balham, Tooting or Battersea alongside newer residents, all contributing ideas and gently correcting scripts using their local knowledge.

The show accumulated **over 100,000 listens** and gathered a passionate following. One audience member said **"I've been listening to The Wandsworth Way from the very beginning, now I've got to know the characters and I'm so invested in their storylines - even though I don't live in Wandsworth I think I've got to know the borough a little bit through the show and I'm just excited to tune in every week as I've got to know what's going to happen with Tash and Mike next!"**

For some, the project provided a space for emotional processing and renewed pride in local history. Multiple interviewees said they had **"learned new things"** about the area, significant historical events associated with locations across the borough, and lesser-known histories, such as pubs that have closed down or stores that once existed. Referencing these in scripts encouraged listeners to explore them too. Participants talked about becoming **"much more aware"** of places when travelling through the borough, spotting references like Starburger or the Lido on their bus route and feeling that the show **"strengthens your bond to the area"**. Similarly, the show brought a sense of place to the listeners. One listener on social media commented **"I'm enjoying the series so much. I moved to Wandsworth five years ago and hope to be a resident for life; it makes me feel genuinely more connected to the area and the characters are wonderful, it's really fabulously written. Thank you for making it."**



The Wandsworth Way left a legacy that reaches beyond the final episode. Across the interviews, participants described being inspired creatively, building new skills and connections that will shape what they do next. One of the co-producers reflected on watching participants grow over the course of the project, especially those without prior acting skills. One actor spoke of a process that inspired her to pursue it further: **"I'll definitely be looking to do more of it."** For some, the programme shaped how they participate in their own communities, with one writer feeling **"inspired to become more active in the community."**

CASE STUDY

Liberty Festival

Liberty Festival, the Mayor of London's flagship disability arts festival, took place across five days in September 2025, and was delivered in partnership with disabled-led arts organisation, CRIPTic Arts.

Events took place in iconic venues across the borough, including Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Tara Theatre, World Heart Beat and Clapham Grand. The festival featured approximately 50 disabled creatives and 20 access providers, all paid to deliver a bold and inclusive programme spanning classical music to rave, hip-hop theatre to contemporary dance, alongside immersive installations.

Offering disabled artists a high-profile platform to present ambitious and innovative work to new audiences was a key impact of Liberty Festival. CRIPTic Arts intentionally balanced local talent with nationally recognised disability arts practitioners.

"We wanted both to promote Wandsworth-based creatives specifically, but also to bring exceptional creativity to Wandsworth."

Jamie Hale, Artistic Director, CRIPTic Arts

For many artists, performing in major cultural venues was a significant professional milestone.

"I was supremely ecstatic because I'd been trying to crack into Battersea Arts Centre as an artist for quite some time."

Amanda Grace, Liberty Artist

Liberty Festival also increased the visibility of disability arts across Wandsworth and beyond. By placing disability-led work at the centre of the London Borough of Culture programme, the festival attracted disabled and non-disabled audiences alike, creating shared cultural experiences that challenged perceptions about accessibility and artistic excellence. Events such as Disco Neurotico and Deaf Rave's Takeover Party demonstrated how inclusive programming can create vibrant, welcoming spaces without compromising artistic ambition.

A defining strength of Liberty Festival was its disability-led approach. Artists consistently highlighted the supportive production environment created by CRIPTic Arts, where access needs, wellbeing and sustainable working practices were embedded from the outset.

"It is so rare to have a no-to-low-stress, well-paying, rewarding job where everyone asks you what you need to do the work, and then gives it to you."

Amanda Grace, Artist

The festival also generated lasting professional development opportunities. Artists built new networks, gained exposure to major venues and, in some cases, secured future commissions and leadership opportunities. For CRIPTic Arts, delivering Liberty Festival marked an important step in its own growth and recognition within the sector.

"Being selected as a disabled-led organisation to take part in something which is such a core part of disability culture was really significant in professionalising us."

Jamie Hale, Artistic Director, CRIPTic Arts

Beyond the artists themselves, Liberty Festival helped strengthen accessibility across Wandsworth's cultural sector. Partner venues improved access measures, invested in staff training and developed stronger relationships with disabled artists and audiences, creating changes that will continue beyond the festival.

Liberty Festival 2025 left a strong legacy for artists, organisations and audiences in Wandsworth. The festival increased the visibility of disability arts, created new professional opportunities and ambition for disabled artists and disabled-led organisations, and strengthened inclusive organisational practice. Importantly, Liberty demonstrated how disabled-led cultural practice can shape a more inclusive cultural sector, positioning disability arts as a vital part of London's cultural landscape.





Supporting Jobs, Creative Businesses and Investment

As well as delivering cultural, community and wellbeing benefits, **Welcome to Wandsworth** made a significant contribution to the local economy.

Social value consultancy RealWorth's independent report calculated that between April 2025 and March 2026, the London Borough of Culture Programme created an estimated **£51.1 million** in total social value.*

Of highest value (per person) were the employment opportunities created through London Borough of Culture programmes, which helped create at least **627 paid employment opportunities across the borough**.

Of these, **111 roles** were created through projects managed by **Wandsworth Council** and **516 by London Borough of Culture partners**. The vast majority of these opportunities supported the freelance creative workforce, with freelancers making up **80% of council-created roles** and **95% of partner-created roles**. Importantly, at least

three partner-funded roles have continued beyond the programme and have become permanent positions. These employment opportunities generated an estimated social value of **£2,957,000 (£4,694 per person)**. For artists and creatives, who benefited from professional development opportunities, commissions, networking opportunities, increased visibility, skills development, or enhanced employment prospects, the social value was **£1,226,000 (£507 per person)**.

The **participation** element of the programme (including the volunteering) also generated significant social value **£36,818,000 (or £351 per person)** highlighting that those most actively involved experienced the greatest social benefits. This reflects Welcome to Wandsworth's emphasis on participatory activity, volunteering opportunities, co-creation programmes, and community-led cultural engagement.

The **£10,088,000** of social value generated for **audience members (£49 per person)** also demonstrates the wide reach of the programme, extending benefits beyond direct participants to residents and visitors who attended events.

The strongest outcomes were seen in education and skills development (**£14.2m**), wellbeing (**£14.2m**) and community connection (**£11.5m**). Thousands of people reported gaining new skills, feeling more confident, improving their mental wellbeing and developing a stronger sense of belonging in their local area.

The programme also provided a direct boost to Wandsworth's creative sector. Through London Borough of Culture funding, an additional **£325,804 was awarded to local artists, organisations and community groups**, helping creative projects and ideas flourish across the borough. Special thanks to the **Wimbledon Foundation** who invested **£125,000** into the London Borough of Culture programme. Alongside this, the programme attracted substantial external investment, securing **more than £5.5 million in match funding** that brought new resources and opportunities into Wandsworth.

A standout example of this impact is **Re:Create Wandsworth**, a business support programme for creative freelancers, artists and small creative businesses. Funded by Wandsworth Council and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Re:Create combined one-to-one mentoring, online business skills training and networking opportunities to help participants build confidence, resilience and stronger local connections. The programme supported **50 Wandsworth-based creatives in 2024-25** and **40 in 2025-26**. Creative United's evaluation found that participants from the 2025-26 cohort reported an average increase in income of **£8,666** after completing the programme, generating an estimated **£180,266 in additional earnings** across the cohort. This equates to a return of **£3 for every £1 invested**. Using Creative United's social value framework, Re:Create generated an estimated **£497,812 in social value**, equivalent to **£7.45 of social value for every £1 invested** in the programme.



Beyond the direct benefits to creative workers and organisations, Welcome to Wandsworth also helped drive spending in local businesses. Research from major cultural events consistently shows the positive effect of cultural activity on local economies, supporting high streets, hospitality businesses and wider regeneration.

Survey data collected from audiences attending seven London Borough of Culture events showed that visitors spent an average of £18.19 in the local economy in connection with their attendance. Based on the programme's total 517,916 in-person engagements, this suggests that around **£9.4 million** was spent locally as a result of the programme. Events like Tooting Food Festival resulted in the local markets gaining around 75% more footfall traffic on those days than the previous Valentine's Day weekend, and resulting in all traders (not just the food traders who participated) benefitting from the increased footfall.

While it is not possible to determine exactly how much of this spending was entirely additional to the local economy, the audience profile suggests a substantial proportion was generated by the programme itself. More than half of attendees (**53%**) travelled from outside Wandsworth, and almost a quarter (**23%**) came from outside London, bringing new visitors and new spending into the borough and helping to showcase Wandsworth as a vibrant cultural destination.



Read the full SROI Report here

*Using data collected by Wandsworth Council and its delivery partners, RealWorth's Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis identified and monetised key stakeholder outcomes, applying Social Value International principles and wellbeing valuation techniques to quantify the programme's social value and overall impact.

CASE STUDY

Wandsworth Arts Fringe

As part of Wandsworth's London Borough of Culture programme, Wandsworth Arts Fringe (WAF) delivered its most ambitious festival to date: running across 17 days in June, WAF 2025 presented over 150 events across 65 venues, engaging 24,842 people and involving 767 creatives.

London Borough of Culture funding and focus allowed WAF to expand on its year-long model of engagement: from recruitment and training in autumn, outreach from January, to delivery in June – forging strong, year-round relationships with communities, artists and partners. As highlighted in the separate WAF Impact report, early engagement such as school workshops and estate-based activity strengthened and deepened participation at key events.

At the heart of WAF's success is a collaborative model that brings together artists, producers, venues and communities to deliver a shared vision. This approach was visible across the programme: projects developed with residents, estates, schools and local groups created programming that felt relevant, inclusive and rooted in place.

As one producer reflected: **"If you collaborate with the community, they will collaborate with you. That, is the key to the success of this show."**

London Borough of Culture enabled WAF 2025 to expand its artists and audience engagement programmes and pilot new approaches. Firstly, working with Associate Producers, who connected with local networks, attracted new audiences as well as helping **"to increase the diversity of artists that didn't come through open access"**. The 2025 programme involved a diverse range of artists, with 31% identifying as from Global Majority backgrounds and wide representation across disability, LGBTQIA+ and socio-economic backgrounds.

Secondly, targeted grant giving enabled **"much more focused demographic work with residents in geographical areas where we tend to have gaps."** Finally, commissioning participatory projects before the festival, such as Parade - The Giant Wheel project on the Alton Estate, a major outdoor performance piece by Autin Dance Theatre, featuring a striking 12-foot wooden wheel powered by 5-6 street dancers, and a large cast of local community performers, created opportunities to engage communities in cultural programming – often for the first time.

London Borough of Culture investment enabled WAF to expand its reach, both geographically and demographically. The festival delivered activity in all 22 wards, bringing culture into every corner of Wandsworth. Key to achieving this was the festival's work with five hub venues and the use of a wide network of spaces, including non-traditional cultural venues and everyday spaces, such as libraries, churches, estates, parks, pubs and the high street, alongside cultural institutions.

This approach of taking creative activity to people's doorsteps helped break down barriers to participation. As one creative noted, bringing work directly into communities makes it accessible **"All you need is a patch of grass, and now there's a whole show in their backyard."** It also changed how audiences experienced the borough. One attendee reflected on discovering new spaces and communities through the programme, while a local councillor highlighted that: **"Events like this are really important because they bring people together who wouldn't normally socialise... and that just helps to build a community."**

Audience feedback reinforces this impact, with 83% agreeing that WAF enhanced their sense of community and 76% saying it helped them feel connected to others.



Developing the local cultural infrastructure

By investing in partnerships and networks with cultural organisations, schools, community groups and a range of venues, WAF strengthened the long-term sustainability of the local infrastructure. However, WAF also brought in external voices of experienced artists and organisations – which helped to inspire and increase aspirations of local artists, as well as introducing them to new ways of working. **63% of creatives reported working in new ways,** and many developed new partnerships that will continue beyond the festival.

Creatives also consistently highlighted the value of working together, with collaboration enabling them to test ideas, build audiences and grow professionally within a supportive ecosystem.

The London Borough of Culture 'umbrella' and increased investment enabled WAF in 2025 to experiment with a wider range of approaches that places communities at its core. The enhanced promotion for WAF over the year has increased its reach of audiences and participants, worked with a more representative pool of artists, facilitated creative collaborations, and strengthened community connections and local pride. These positive outcomes highlight the benefits of long-term engagement, co-creation, and a borough-wide, place-based approach – resulting in more than just a festival, but a connected, creative borough.



Read the full WAF impact report here

Strengthening Wandsworth Council and our Partnerships

Delivering Welcome to Wandsworth has not only benefited residents, communities and the local economy. It has also had a lasting impact on Wandsworth Council itself.

The scale and ambition of the London Borough of Culture programme created opportunities for the council to engage with people, organisations and sectors in new ways. From working with young people in schools to collaborating with businesses, artists and community groups, the programme opened doors that might not otherwise have been available. In doing so, it demonstrated the council's ability to deliver large-scale cultural programmes and helped raise the profile of both the borough and the organisation.

"It raises the Borough's profile quite significantly with all the activity that's gone on throughout the year. And so that's been a real plus: raising the reputation and profile of the council."

Council Staff Member, Growth and Place Directorate

The programme also provided significant professional development opportunities for staff. Teams across the council gained new skills, experiences and confidence through delivering an ambitious programme of activity, with many colleagues taking on challenges and responsibilities they would not otherwise have encountered.

"The amount of development, the experience that staff members have had over the past year... look at what we achieved, look at what we can do again in the future."

Council Staff Member, Chief Executive's Group

One of the most important areas of learning has been around accessibility and inclusive practice. Through our partnership with Liberty Festival, staff were encouraged to challenge assumptions, reflect on existing approaches and consider how services can be made more inclusive. This learning has helped embed a stronger awareness of



accessibility across the organisation. As a lasting legacy, a best practice guide was produced to support staff in meeting inclusivity and accessibility objectives in future projects and programmes.

The London Borough of Culture year also strengthened collaboration across council services. Teams that would not typically work together came together around shared goals, including colleagues from Arts and Culture, Children's Services, Economic Development, Public Health, Libraries, Communications, Planning and Finance.

Importantly, the programme also demonstrated the value of creative approaches in areas beyond traditional cultural services. One example was Public Health, where colleagues began exploring how creativity and culture could help engage residents and support health and wellbeing objectives.

"There are a number of other colleagues working in Public Health who have started to think about how we can use and talk about health from a cultural perspective."

Council Staff Member, Adult Social Care and Public Health Directorate

Beyond the council itself, Welcome to Wandsworth strengthened relationships with partners across the borough. The programme brought together cultural organisations, community groups, businesses, residents and voluntary sector organisations, creating new connections and reinforcing existing ones.

A strong example of this was African Caribbean Food Month, led by the council's Economic Development team. The initiative enabled staff to engage with a much wider range of community organisations than they would through their usual business-focused activity.

"It took us away from just working directly with businesses. We began communicating and engaging with community groups that we probably wouldn't have engaged with if we weren't running the African Caribbean Food Month."

Council Staff Member, Growth and Place Directorate

Partners also spoke positively about the collaborative spirit that emerged throughout the year. Many described a shared commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for residents and recognised the value of working together towards a common goal.

Looking ahead, both the council and its partners believe that the networks, partnerships and ways of working established through Welcome to Wandsworth will continue to benefit the borough long after the programme has ended.

"We're really proud of what's been delivered collectively. Beyond the numbers though, what feels most important is what's been set in motion: the relationships built, the ideas tested, and the opportunities created that can continue well beyond this year."

Partner Organisation

Overall, Welcome to Wandsworth has created a strong organisational legacy for Wandsworth Council.

The programme has also highlighted important lessons for the future. Delivering an initiative of this scale required significant commitment from staff, with some teams investing more time and resource than originally anticipated. As we move forward, a key challenge will be sustaining the momentum, partnerships and learning generated through Welcome to Wandsworth, while ensuring they can continue to deliver lasting benefits for residents, communities and the borough as a whole.



CASE STUDY

African Caribbean Food Month: A feast of stories, identity and community in Wandsworth

If restaurant critics usually judge a meal on flavour, atmosphere and service, then Wandsworth's African Caribbean Food Month deserved five stars for something far richer: its ability to feed community, memory and belonging all at once.

Served up as part of Wandsworth's London Borough of Culture year and Black History Month, this month-long programme transformed libraries, community spaces and local venues into places where food became conversation, culture and celebration. Across workshops, tastings, storytelling sessions and live demonstrations, African and Caribbean food was not simply presented as cuisine, but as history on a plate. And what emerged most strongly was this: people were hungry for it.

"It's more than just food"

There are restaurants that serve food, and then there are places that nourish something much deeper. Tucked into the Alton Estate in Roehampton, Chantelle's Community Kitchen may not have white tablecloths, waiting lists or a celebrity chef, but what it offers is far rarer: a place where hot meals sit alongside practical support and conversation, and the feeling that somebody is genuinely glad you walked through the door.

Founder Chantelle Bent speaks about food with the warmth of someone who understands its emotional power. **"It's more than just about food. It's about community... really making sure they know that they matter and that they are cared for."**

The kitchen itself was born from Chantelle's experiences living locally and seeing families struggling with poverty and isolation. An idea quickly became a grassroots operation offering nutritious meals, groceries, cooking classes, clothing support and practical help for residents navigating homelessness or domestic crises.

Yet like all great chefs, Chantelle understands that food is emotional architecture. A hot meal can restore confidence. A shared table can create community.



A familiar flavour can make somebody feel visible again. She speaks passionately about wanting people to feel welcomed, not processed: **"We don't want it to feel like a food bank or a soup kitchen, we're a community kitchen. People say we don't feel 'council-ly' – it just feels warm."**

That philosophy shaped the Kitchen's contribution to African Caribbean Food Month: a vibrant event at Roehampton Library filled with Jamaican and African dishes, colourful displays of traditional produce, children's activities and tables crowded with residents eager to try something new. They sampled unfamiliar ingredients, swapped memories and discovered the cultural meaning behind recipes.

The response? Overwhelming. The library later described it as the best attended Black History Month event they had ever hosted, attracting more than 250 people from Roehampton, Putney, Earlsfield and across Wandsworth.

Caribbean food with ambition

A few miles away, Top Taste serves Jamaican dishes – Jerk chicken, curry goat, patties and rice and peas – to give customers **"the experience of the Caribbean"**. Owner Andre also offers a different but equally important flavour of African Caribbean Food Month: entrepreneurial ambition.

For Andre, participating in African Caribbean Food Month was about visibility as much as celebration. The programme introduced local businesses to new audiences and new opportunities, connecting restaurant owners, caterers and entrepreneurs who often work independently – and imagine bigger futures.

That aspiration – for African and Caribbean food businesses and organisations to thrive visibly and confidently within the borough – runs throughout the programme. For Chantelle's Community Kitchen, participating in the Food Month didn't just leave people wanting a second sitting of the sampled dishes, but also asking how they could help keep the doors open: **"People were offering their volunteering... offering to donate things to the kitchen... support us if we're having any other events."**

Stories passed down through generations

The most memorable moments were often the smallest. A young boy trying Jamaican curry goat for the first time. A parent asking for recipes to recreate dishes at home. Residents discussing how grandparents passed cooking traditions down through families. **"Many dishes have stories attached to them,"** Chantelle says. **"Recipes were passed down to me from my parents who come from their parents."** This was food functioning exactly as heritage should: alive, shared and evolving.

Lessons learnt

Every successful pop-up leaves diners wanting more, and African Caribbean Food Month was no exception. Participants reflected on the need for larger venues, greater funding and more outdoor, street-level events that allow passers-by to stumble across the celebrations naturally. Andre imagines future versions spilling into public spaces: **"Just pass through, have a look, have a taste."**

Chantelle, meanwhile, noted the need for practical support for grassroots organisations, particularly as ingredient costs continue to rise and demand grows year on year.

A borough hungry for more

African Caribbean Food Month succeeded because it understood something fundamental: food is never just food. It is dignity for families struggling to make ends meet. It is memory carried across generations. It is business owners daring to dream bigger. It is children trying something unfamiliar and loving it. It is communities seeing themselves reflected in the cultural life of their borough.

And like any truly memorable meal, its impact lingered long after the plates were cleared. **"It's opened the door for many opportunities now to go forward,"** Chantelle reflected. **"People want it again and again."**





What We've Learned

As we look back on this incredible year, we have much to celebrate. But we also faced challenges along the way and have learned lessons for the future.

One of the main challenges across the programme was to engage residents consistently across all communities and neighbourhoods, particularly those who were not already engaged with arts and culture. Projects often required much more time than anticipated to build trust, raise awareness and encourage participation.

The scale and ambition of the programme created operational and communication challenges, particularly where projects involved multiple partners, venues, artists, volunteers and council teams. Some projects reported confusion around messaging, branding and responsibilities across partners.

Capacity and time pressures were another recurring issue. Delivery teams, artists and volunteers often worked within compressed timelines while managing ambitious borough-wide activity. Many projects would have benefited from more lead-in time, especially those where relationship-building and co-creation were central to delivery. Funding and sustainability concerns also emerged, particularly around maintaining projects, partnerships and momentum beyond the London Borough of Culture year itself.

Finally, while inclusion was a major strength of the programme, genuinely inclusive practice proved resource intensive. Successful engagement with diverse communities required skilled facilitation, accessibility support, trusted local partnerships and sustained presence within neighbourhoods.

Some of the key lessons learned therefore include:

- **Meaningful community engagement takes time and must be built through trusted relationships:** Projects were most successful when they worked through local organisations and community networks; involved residents from the outset; maintained consistent local presence; and prioritised co-creation over short-term outreach. Participation and trust cannot be developed through marketing alone.
- **Participatory approaches are key to creating impact:** The strongest impact was achieved where residents felt represented and actively involved rather than simply attending events. Participatory approaches seem to create stronger ownership, confidence, wellbeing, community connection, and local pride.
- **Flexible and adaptable delivery is critical:** Flexibility and adaptability emerged as essential for delivering large-scale participatory programmes. Successful projects were those that adapted delivery models when needed, responded to local circumstances, revised plans collaboratively, and balanced artistic ambition with practical realities.
- **Cultural infrastructure is about relationships as much as venues or events:** Successful cultural ecosystems depend on networks, partnerships, local trust, mentoring, collaboration and social and cultural relationships across the borough as much as physical infrastructure.

The Legacy

The legacy of our Welcome to Wandsworth programme goes much beyond a successful but single year of cultural events, increased attendance and celebration. The evaluation suggests that it will leave a deeper and longer lasting impact, by:

- **Building long-term creative confidence:** Our programme has increased confidence, participation and creative engagement among residents who may not previously have seen themselves as artists, cultural participants or creative professionals. Whether young people taking part in school programmes like Our Beautiful Neighbourhood, volunteers supporting events, emerging artists presenting work publicly, residents contributing stories, or participants engaging in creative health projects, the programme did not simply deliver cultural experiences to audiences but actively developed people's confidence to participate in creating cultural programmes themselves.
- **Strengthening local networks:** London Borough of Culture created new forms of collaboration between cultural institutions, schools, libraries, health organisations, local businesses, grassroots organisations, and community venues. From Wandsworth Arts Fringe, working through a network of both cultural and non-cultural venues to reach residents across all wards of the borough, to Strictly Wandsworth, bringing organisations together around a shared creative goal, and to Culturally Mindful, bringing artists into healthcare and wellbeing settings: the London Borough of Culture legacy lies not only in the individual project relationships, but in the longer-term 'infrastructure' of trust and collaborative working that was built across sectors.
- **Developing emerging talent:** Our programme made a substantial contribution to developing local talent and supporting emerging creatives, particularly young people, Global Majority creatives, disabled artists and

people entering the sector for the first time. Through initiatives such as the Internship programme, the WAF Associate Producers Programme, appointing a disabled-led producing organisation for the Liberty Festival, and artist commissions, Welcome to Wandsworth helped emerging creative talent to build skills, networks and career pathways - thus strengthening the borough's wider creative workforce and cultural ecology.

- **Embedding inclusive cultural participation:** Our programme was shaped by its diverse audiences, participants, volunteers and artists. We want our programme to reflect and represent the communities who live here, with focussed support being given to creatives and participants with limited prior access to arts and culture. Projects like The Wandsworth Way were explicitly designed to reflect the diversity of the borough through its casting, writing and collaborative process, not simply diversifying audiences, but changing who gets to shape and produce culture.
- **Increasing civic involvement:** Welcome to Wandsworth strengthened civic engagement and local leadership through volunteering and participatory decision-making. The Local Champions programme is particularly significant in this respect, as local residents became active contributors to programme delivery and governance. Projects like Story Catchers, Young Journalists or Young Producers also invested in youth leadership and engagement, increasing our communities' confidence to shape public life.
- **Demonstrating how culture can support wellbeing, belonging and community cohesion:** The evidence from the London Borough of Culture year clearly positions culture not only as entertainment, but as part of a wider ecosystem of social resilience, emotional wellbeing and community care. Creative health projects like Memory Boxes successfully delivered health and wellbeing support through cultural activities, while community-led projects like African Caribbean Food Month used food culture as a means of celebrating identity, heritage and belonging within local communities. Dance and singing programmes have highlighted the positive benefits on physical and mental health. London Borough of Culture has demonstrated the role that arts and culture can play in both local and national government's prevention and early intervention agenda, helping to resolve or slow down issues that may otherwise lead to significant costs on the public purse.

Most importantly, our programme has shifted how many residents, organisations and creatives understand culture itself: not as something delivered by institutions to passive audiences, but as something collaborative, local, participatory and rooted in everyday community life. The Mayor of London's and National Lottery Heritage Fund funding for legacy projects over 2026 provides a welcome opportunity to further build on this.



"SO grateful for this. So often projects like this end just as relationships and ideas begin to take shape, so having legacy funding creates an opportunity to build on what's already been developed. There's a strong foundation here, and it will be exciting to see how that can grow and evolve over time."

Artist, Culturally Mindful

