

PROJECT REPORT

2021 | JUNE

Back on Track

Project Lead: Caroline Holden, Community Rail Development Officer

Artist: Karen Allerton

Lines: Clitheroe Line

Station: Darwen Station

Budget: £4,000

Funder: Community Rail Lancashire





OVERVIEW

This project was developed with professional community artist, Karen Allerton and CANW, a charity now in its 130th year working with vulnerable young people in a range of settings, their moto 'Inspiring lives and changing futures'.

The participants included young people who had recently left care, or on the cusp of doing so, or with day to day caring responsibilities for a parent or sibling at home. Isolation was commonplace due to their personal situations, only to be compounded by Covid-19!

Back on Track 2020 was developed as a direct result of Covid-19 to support the young people to think about the impact the lockdown was having on their lives, both highs and the lows and explore their hopes for the remainder of the year and their future. The aims of the project were:

- For the young people involved to not be derailed by the pandemic, having an opportunity to look ahead positively, connect to the outside world even from their own homes and not lose sight of working towards reaching their ambitions and potential.
- To widen their travel horizons while remaining at home by providing an opportunity to become familiar with the local railway network and gain confidence travelling by train as lockdown restrictions were lifted.

APPROACH

This project was designed so that it could take place whatever the lockdown restrictions, though it was hoped it would be possible for Karen to meet with the group face to face at some point, perhaps even taking a train journey, but this wasn't and hasn't happened yet, but being planned as this paper is written.

Karen Allerton put together an Art Box for each of the 10 young people and CANW delivered it to each of their homes using their pandemic protocols. The Art Box had everything in it for the sessions – inks, pens, water colours, pencils – 'like having Christmas early' said one of the participants to Karen!

The on-line sessions took place all by Zoom due to the greater Covid-19 restrictions that were introduced in September. Each session focused on different types of art medium and their experiences of this time. How the young people felt was explored at each session to support them getting Back on Track! They then developed what inspired them, including the topic, the use of words and visual imagery, using the art mediums supplied for the sessions.

All young people were fully supported throughout the project by Karen and the CANW lead. CANW also facilitated the technical on-line sessions and ensured the safeguarding at all sessions.

OUTPUTS

Production and display of a series of artwork designed by the CANW young people, with 12 on-line Zoom art session facilitating the creation of the artwork:

- 2 large artwork boards in di-bond erected on the fencing at both platforms
- 10 different circular bubbles in di-bond erected on the fencing on both platforms
- An explanatory poster displayed in the CRL noticeboards on both platforms giving details of the project and the artwork installed
- Video of the install and the young people as they view their to showcase the positive contribution this project has had to those who have taken part and the legacy left at the station.
- To go ahead when restrictions allow – a train trip from Darwen Station to Clitheroe or Whalley Stations (dependent on the interests of the group). The purpose of this is to celebrate the young people's work, gain experience of travelling by rail and become familiar with the local places of interest in the area, encouraging more train travel.



OUTCOMES

- 10 young people were able to be supported to consider the impact the lockdown on their lives and learn new art skills with a professional artist:
 - The series of artwork displayed at the station includes circles which represent the bubbles every individual found themselves in during the pandemic. The young people chose the focus of their artwork considering the ways they were looking forward to breaking out of the bubbles when restrictions allowed – hence the butterflies in the larger artwork pieces and a rainbow - synonymous with this period.
 - 12 on-line Zoom art session took place with the group each on a different artistic theme including introductions, a chance to talk together about the project concept and opening up their Art Box. There were sessions on loose pen and ink drawings, exploring watercolour paints to create backgrounds and moods, and time to develop their artwork designs.
- Provided an opportunity for the young people to make new friends as none of them knew each other before the project and they will meet each other in person in due course.
- Delivery of the Art Box to each participant facilitated by CANW in a socially distance way also provided an opportunity for contact with the young people when delivery took place.
- To enhance the ambiance and welcoming feel of both platforms. The artwork has lifted the station and even during the install was creating a positive interest with waiting passengers who were keen to learn more about the project and were enjoying the brightness and perspectives shown in the artwork. It has been a topic close to everyone, bringing a connection with passengers; encouraging conversation and hopefully supporting passengers positive perspective on a period of time difficult for all in various ways, reflected in the range of artworks.

WHAT WORKED WELL

The CANW were delighted to have the project customised specially to support their organisation. It provided an exciting experience for the young people to do something new even at a time when everyone was forced to remain predominately at home, helping to support their well-being in a safe environment, keeping their connection with the outside world, meeting new people and achieving a great product ultimately displayed at the station.

It provided an opportunity for young people to reflect on the pandemic, how it was affecting their lives, but also to turn it into a positive experience and help them gain confidence to get out and about again, encouraging them also to use their local railway station!

The young people were able to develop and increase their creative skills by working with a professional artist even from their own homes during the lockdown.

The flexibility and ingenuity of the artist, Karen to adapt to the changing situations and be sensitive to the circumstances of the young people. Karen even set up several additional sessions to meet the needs of the participants.

The enthusiasm and support of CANW to facilitate the project including the technical and professional support, ensured all the young people and the artist were able to access all the sessions by Zoom and that the young people could be supplied with their Art Boxes safely during the lockdown period and be involved in a creative project at home.

The forging of strong links with CANW, with plans to further support groups of CANW young people with rail travel confidence, sessions to promote the career opportunities in the rail industry (the first being planned for July 2021) and being invited to showcase this project as Best Practice when offering remote support.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Keep flexible, adaptable, and open to change.
- With the project being developed in lockdown, it was devised to be able to adapt to any changing restrictions and enable all involved to have confidence that the project would achieve results regardless.
- Being able to produce great artwork and sessions that kept the young people 'on-board' throughout the project, overcoming the lack of face-to-face physical contact.
- It is possible for projects to keep the enthusiasm and commitment of groups over a long period of time. Though the on-line sessions ended in December, close contacts have been maintained and all participants keen to be involved in connected activities including the artwork tour and train trip in due course.
- The enthusiasm of the group, even though they have not met physically to still meet face to face, even if the artwork project itself took place in 2020. The enthusiasm generated, even from this on-line project is a testament to its positive impact, showing that acquaintances and connections can be developed even in such circumstances. It demonstrates that by maintaining regular contact with partners participants can remain engaged and involved.
- The links forged have facilitated further opportunities to connect with the wider networks within CANW, so extending the reach to a wider population for rail confidence and travel opportunities.
- To involve our TOC (Northern) from the beginning of projects, so that they are aware and can support – they are a valuable resource and knowledge base.
- Ensure budgets for such projects always allows for a celebration.