“These sessions have been a godsend. They've brought the different Streetwise regions together and we've made stronger friendships over the last year.”
“The digital projects have not only kept me sane, they have also been a gateway to learn about different artists and performance styles”
"It's been amazing to have Streetwise Opera during this insane lockdown as there has truly been no other entity that I can think of that has really instilled in all of us that we are expressing ourselves in the most eclectic way regardless of our troubles."
“I loved the interaction and being able to volunteer to demonstrate live what we have learnt during the session. I’ve enjoyed learning how to record myself singing and dancing, as well as new camera techniques.”
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1. Introduction
Streetwise Opera is an arts organisation working with the homeless sector to inspire change and empower people to realise their own creative potential. We aim to transform lives by supporting people to make meaningful connections through the arts, rebuild social networks, improve wellbeing and develop new skills.

We engage world-class artists to collaborate with diverse individuals affected by homelessness to create powerful works of art, and to positively impact how society views homelessness. And we use the arts to explore and innovate how homeless services can be best designed for individuals.

We run a programme of singing and creative workshops in London, Manchester and Nottingham, that inspires and empowers people who are recovering from homelessness. As they engage with our work, Streetwise Opera performers improve their wellbeing and rebuild their social networks, and we have a robust evaluation system that helps us demonstrate the difference we make.

People who experience homelessness very often suffer from a diminished sense of self-worth and low expectations about what they can achieve and what they can expect from life. Streetwise Opera performers reinvent themselves as creators who make the world more beautiful and have the power to bring audiences to their feet. This gives them the confidence and inspiration to rebuild their lives.

This year has been especially challenging for participants and staff at Streetwise Opera, as the organisation and the sector sought to respond and adapt to the restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report describes how we did this, who we supported and what difference our support made.

1. Introduction
1.1 The year when everything changed...

There is no doubt that 2020-21 was an extraordinary year which brought immense challenges, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalised in society. At the same time, there were also significant positive developments in the sector through the launch of ‘Everyone In’, a nationwide drive to get everyone into safe accommodation during the pandemic. A survey carried out by Crisis at the end of 2020 to explore the impact of COVID-19 on people facing homelessness and service provision across Great Britain (Crisis, 2020) found that:

- There has been a continued new flow of people experiencing homelessness since the start of the pandemic. During the first few months of the pandemic, the increase was driven by those already experiencing homelessness - people who were sofa surfing and living in dangerous and transient accommodation – who became more visible as their living situations forced them to access help. Towards the second wave of the pandemic, there were bigger increases in people who were experiencing homelessness for the first time, people who had been furloughed and those who were newly unemployed.

- Homelessness among people with No Recourse to Public Funds was a continued issue throughout the whole of the pandemic. The instruction to local authorities to support everyone who was rough sleeping or in accommodation where they could not self-isolate into safe emergency accommodation meant that all local authorities reported an increase in support being provided for people with No Recourse to Public Funds including EEA nationals without entitlements to benefits. In some cases, local authorities reported accommodating quite significant numbers of such individuals but the extent to which they were able to offer support beyond emergency accommodation was limited.

- The ‘Everyone In’ initiative saved lives during the pandemic, with infection rates and deaths amongst people experiencing homelessness at extremely low levels in the UK compared to internationally. However, the structural barriers that existed before the pandemic, such as a lack of housing supply and a welfare system that does not address the underlying causes of homelessness, were exacerbated during the pandemic and made it difficult for those in emergency COVID-19 accommodation to access permanent and secure housing.

- There was an increase in the support needs of those seeking help, particularly in terms of loneliness and isolation, and mental health issues. Digital exclusion also became increasingly significant over the later phase of the pandemic.

- Homelessness services had to adapt their provision very quickly in response to social distancing new safety measures. In this context how support provided around digital inclusion became an increasingly important part of service provision amongst organisations supporting people experiencing homelessness.
What we delivered in 2020-21

Streetwise Sessions
A video performance of Schubert’s The Linden Tree
A Gallery For All
The Deer: A Story in Eight Chapters, a digital mini-opera

Culture Club
Unseen
In This Place
Respond
1.2 Evaluating our impact

**Streetwise Opera's vision** is a world in which homelessness does not prevent people from realising their creative potential and the arts positively impact how society views homelessness.

**Our aims are to:**
- **Empower** people affected by homelessness to make works of art, sing and perform and be given the agency to realise their own creative potential.
- **Innovate** interdisciplinary practice cross-sector, embedding the arts within services to support people affected by homelessness.
- **Create** live performance and works of art that reflect diverse, marginalised voices and challenge perceptions of homelessness.
- **Transform** lives: to make meaningful connections through the arts, rebuild social networks, improve wellbeing and develop new skills.

Underpinning all our aims is our commitment to diversity and inclusion, as we create a barrier-free programme of work, reaching as many different people affected by homelessness as possible and ensuring the company, its artists, staff, trustees and partners are truly representative of the communities within which we work.

We monitor and evaluate our work through collecting data and regular feedback from participants and others that we engage with. Usually, this involves asking participants to complete a series of monitoring forms at various points in their time with us, as well as holding annual focus groups with all our regional groups to provide opportunities for participants to tell us how they feel about taking part in Streetwise Opera's activities and how this helps them.

Over the last year, we have continued to collect information to assess our aims, however our monitoring and evaluation activities have had to be adapted to reflect the different engagement (online) that Streetwise Opera has had with participants. This also meant that we expanded the focus of our evaluation to explore how participants have been able to engage with us online – both the benefits and challenges of this – and what difference this has made to them in terms of:

- resilience
- social inclusion
- emotional wellbeing
- creative development
- digital inclusion.
Having refined our evaluation focus, we then collected feedback from participants and other stakeholders through:

- **4 online focus groups** with 19 participants
- **in-depth telephone interviews** with 3 participants and 2 support workers
- **online/postal surveys** completed by 24 participants, 5 support workers, and 2 homeless centre partners.

The data that we collected was analysed by our evaluation team, using Excel for quantitative data analysis and NVivo for qualitative data analysis.

### A note of caution

It has been more challenging than ever to collect feedback from participants. This means that the monitoring data we routinely collect by giving people paper forms to fill out when they join Streetwise Opera (our ‘getting to know you’ form) and periodically as they participate in our activities (our ‘progress review’ forms) could not be used.

Furthermore, with activities only happening online, some participants have not engaged at all and others have only engaged occasionally. In addition, we have only been able to capture data remotely (i.e. via online surveys, by telephone and by post). This has had an impact on the amount of data that we have been able to collect as some participants did not take part in these activities. This has limited the number of people from whom we have been able to collect feedback for this evaluation. At best, the number of people who took part in the group interviews and completed the feedback survey represents around a quarter (23%) of those who took part in our activities at least once during the year. However, as the survey was anonymous, it is possible that some people took part in the group interviews and completed the survey.

As a result, our findings cannot attempt to provide a representative picture of Streetwise Opera’s impact over the last year. Instead, we have sought to tell the story of the year, extraordinary as it has been, drawing out the challenges and providing some insight into the creativity, joy and emotional sustenance that we have brought to many people’s lives.
1.3 This report

This report contains four main sections:

Section 2
Presents information about the people we have supported during the year and the challenges they faced.

Section 3
Looks at the activities we delivered and presents themes emerging from performer feedback collected through the survey and focus groups that we ran during the year.

Section 4
Looks at the difference that our activities have made to participants.

Section 5
Looks ahead to next year and the plans we have for this.

We have also included a number of case studies in the report to provide insight into the experiences of some of our participants and staff over the last year. However, any names used in the report have been changed in order to protect participants’ anonymity. In addition, it should be noted that we have not used percentages to report on the responses to our evaluation questions as the number of people providing this information was much smaller than in previous years. To present the information as percentages could, therefore, have been misleading and we preferred to be transparent in the way in which we are presenting our data.

Photos

All photos in this report were taken by Streetwise Opera's Head of Marketing and Communications, Rey Trombetta, unless indicated otherwise.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all Streetwise Opera participants who took part in focus groups and completed our feedback survey. We would also like to thank the Streetwise Opera support workers, artists and homeless centre partner staff who provided data that has contributed to this report.

Thank you also to our partner organisations, The Booth Centre and Manchester Art Gallery in Manchester, Emmanuel House Support Centre and Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall in Nottingham, Middlesbrough Town Hall, Methodist Asylum Project, DePaul and Recovery Connections in Teesside, Sage Gateshead in Tyneside, The Connection at St Martin’s, The Passage and Southbank Centre in London, for supporting our work in 2020-21.
2. Our participants

This section of the report presents information about the people we have supported during the year and the challenges they faced.
2. Our participants   | 2.1 The individuals who participated in our activities this year

A total of 226 individuals took part in our activities in 2020-21, of whom over half (132) attended more than five sessions.

Of the people who participated more than once during the year, we know that:

- Just over half were male, while just under half were female.
- Nearly a third were aged under 45 while over two-thirds were aged 46 and over.
- Over three-quarters were from White ethnic backgrounds while nearly a quarter were from different Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds.

### Gender (n = 150)
- Female 47%
- Male 51%
- Transgender 1%
- Other 1%

### Age (n = 146)
- 18-25: 3%
- 26-35: 11%
- 36-45: 18%
- 46-59: 35%
- 60-65: 17%
- 66+: 16%

### Ethnicity (n = 143)
- White - British/Other 78%
- Other background 1%
- Mixed - White & Asian/Other 3%
- Black - African/British/Caribbean/Other 13%
- Asian - Chinese/Indian/Other 5%
- Other 1%
2.2 Challenges faced by participants

Our participants have suffered a range of difficult experiences in their lives. Analysis of information provided by them when they joined Streetwise Opera revealed that:

- Over two-thirds have experienced homelessness in the past and some are currently homeless. The pandemic made it difficult to reach many people who were newly homeless, but we were able to reach nine people who were new to our work.

- Nearly a third have previously been affected by drug or alcohol issues and four people told us were currently affected by drug or alcohol issues.

- Over half said they were currently affected by mental health issues while over a quarter had previously been affected by mental health issues.

### Homelessness
- In the past: 68%
- Currently: 9%
- Not an issue: 24%

### Drug or alcohol issues
- In the past: 30%
- Currently: 6%
- Not an issue: 64%

### Mental health issues
- In the past: 26%
- Currently: 53%
- Not an issue: 22%
Nearly half said they had a disability or physical health issue while a fifth had previously been affected by disability or physical health issues. Nearly a third said they had a learning disability or difficulty while 10% said they had previously struggled with a learning disability or difficulty.

In addition, five people said they spoke English as a second language and two were asylum seekers/refugees.
2.3 Additional challenges faced this year

Research carried out by Groundswell (2020) revealed that many homeless people experienced an increase in mental health issues and a significant worsening of existing mental health conditions. The pandemic also increased feelings of social isolation, especially during periods of increased social distancing and through times of lockdown. Additionally, despite changes in benefit entitlement during the pandemic, many people experiencing homelessness faced financial hardship and struggled to get access to services and support.

These increases in mental health issues and isolation were also described by our participants. Many of those who completed the feedback survey (n=24) said that they had faced additional challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For many, the pandemic had either caused depression or exacerbated the depression they were already suffering from. One survey respondent simply said:

"Not going out. Depression."

Another explained:

"I have been very depressed at losing all the usual places I used to go to, and physically my health has deteriorated due to sitting on the sofa for the best part of a year. I have only recently been loaned a laptop so that I can participate in activities that I've had to miss out on over the past year."

Isolation was also frequently mentioned as one of the challenges faced because of the pandemic. As one participant put it:

"It's made me feel very lonely, confused and very unsure of myself. And more distant from people outside."

Another said:

"It made me feel lost, tired of missing people I love being with. I've felt very isolated, depressed... My anxiety was hard to cope with during lockdown."

Several described how they had been impacted by the loss of social contact and activities:

"It's affected me in that I had no social interaction with others, not able to sing in performances literally instead of behind a phone screen Zoom box."

"I had to stay indoors ninety percent of the time. It was hard not leaving the house."
Mabel has been participating in Streetwise Opera’s activities for seven years. She was introduced to Streetwise Opera by a friend. At the time, Mabel was suffering from acute depression. Things were so bad that she “would spend days in bed, only going out to buy food. I’d stopped seeing anyone, including my family.”

Mabel wasn’t homeless at the time, but she had been previously, and was terrified she would be again, as she was struggling to cope with maintaining her flat.

Although she was very anxious about joining group activities, Mabel gave it a go and found “it was a revelation. Within a few weeks, I went from not daring to look anyone in the eye to volunteering to sing a solo.”

Things then moved rapidly for Mabel. She enrolled in a Care course and was eventually offered a job in a care home. Unfortunately, she wasn’t able to take on the job as her mother got ill and Mabel took over her mother’s care. “… but I did feel like I’d got my life back. Without Streetwise Opera I genuinely think I would have become homeless again. I’d have lost everything.”

COVID-19 then struck, and the announcement of lockdown terrified Mabel: “I thought Streetwise Opera would stop operating. I had a vision of sinking back into depression, stuck at home all the time with no contact with the outside world. I was amazed and delighted when Streetwise Opera set up all these online activities. It really kept me going.”

Although Mabel has had some difficulties participating in activities online, she found most aspects of it “really enjoyable, particularly meeting all these new people on Zoom. We normally only see the people in our own group, so to make all these new friends was fantastic.”

Mabel is grateful that, as well as making activities available, Streetwise Opera continued to provide her with support “I received regular calls from my support worker, which really made a difference. I knew I wasn’t alone.”
3. Our activities during 2020-2021

This next section of the report looks at the activities we delivered and presents themes emerging from performer feedback collected through the survey and focus groups that we ran during the year.
3.1 An overview of our activities this year

When the national lockdown came into effect in March 2020, we responded quickly, determined to continue supporting people affected by homelessness through music. We suspended our face-to-face activities from mid-March 2020, and for the rest of the year, provided an alternative programme of activities.

Bringing together participants from across the country, our revised programme included online interactive music workshops, digital discussion groups where participants could socialise online, regular phone calls offering pastoral care and communications and creative tasks distributed by mail. We also supported people in hostels through creative workshops in small groups.

We delivered a total of **1,341 activities** in 2020-21.

We delivered:

- **101 livestreams**
- **6 new creative projects**
- **1,096 support calls**
- **181 Zoom sessions**
- **67 online workshops**
3.2 Our activities in more detail

Online workshops were organised from April to October for participants in our different regions. This involved a total of 67 sessions attended by a total of 91 participants.

Streetwise Opera Sessions were a series of livestreamed singalongs shared through Facebook and YouTube, led by the same teaching artists who had been delivering our in-person workshops before the pandemic. In these six sessions, 52 participants explored operas by Mozart, Rossini, Puccini, Verdi, Britten, Bizet and others, as well as musical theatre pieces by Bernstein, Gershwin, Sondheim, Rodgers and Hammerstein.

For me, it’s been a lifeline. I live on my own, so, when we first started, it was a focus for each day, you knew that at 12 o’clock you’d go on Streetwise, and it was something to look forward to.
Digital Tea Breaks brought together 49 participants in both regional groups (Newcastle/Gateshead and Nottingham) and across all regional groups after livestreams, to discuss the new music that they were learning and provide a social experience to participants. These set the foundation for other new projects that were not always centred around singing, allowing Streetwise Opera participants to explore various forms of creativity.

The Linden Tree project provided 18 participants with an opportunity to take part in a digital performance with baritone Roderick Williams, pianist Christopher Glynn, the Brodsky Quartet and singers from Genesis Sixteen. The performance was premiered at Ryedale Festival Online in July and subsequently made available on Streetwise Opera’s website and social media.

One participant said:

"After hearing the final audio recording, I got goosebumps. It is hard to believe this was made from us singing into our phones in our bedrooms. The result is just beautiful, and it makes me very proud. It makes a big difference for me to know I’ve taken part in a project like this."

The video was selected by the Southbank Centre as one of its culture picks for October 2020.
**Creative Sessions** enabled 37 participants to generate poems, drawings, paintings, photography and videos to support other online Streetwise Opera projects.

**A Gallery For All** was subsequently launched to enable anyone who has been homeless to share their art. Artists are invited to share advice and set creative challenges for participants. For example, professional photographer Sam Reed shared exercises and tips on how to capture better images.

It’s been wonderful to go on a virtual tour round an art gallery. It’s expanded our knowledge and made it more interesting. I really thank the organizers for what they’ve done for us.
**Eight Chapters** was inspired by the entries in the online gallery. During September and October, Streetwise, 36 participants worked online with eight composers to co-create the lyrics and music for The Deer: A Story in 8 Chapters. In addition, 22 participants joined via in-person sessions held in homelessness centres. The mini-opera they created focused on a doe that finds the strength and courage to reinvent herself after an accident.

The project enabled participants to work with composers Charlotte Harding, Dominic Harlan, Jessie Maryon Davies, John Barber, Michael Henry, Pete Letanka, Ben See and Esmeralda Conde Ruiz.

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**Culture Club** was a digital project that brought together 51 participants to explore the performing arts. Participants met with a different artist each week, including the poet Mr Gee, screenwriter Rebekah Harrison, composer Nigel Osborne and comedian Mrs Barbara Nice, to discuss how they could tap into their own creativity.

"I'd never done any creative writing in that manner before, so it was exciting, and it was also moving. It was amazing how the creative writing grew; you were like on a journey. It helped to stimulate your creative language."

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"It was an honour to work with top class people. It showed me what imagination and creativity can do. Seeing into the world of different genres, across the whole of the arts spectrum, was fantastic, a great opportunity."
The **Unseen** project aimed to shine a light on Black or female composers who have been ignored by those in power. Working with a team of artists from different disciplines, 44 participants created a video-performance. The project also included artwork created by service users of Women’s Direct Access in Manchester, produced during workshops with interference-art.

Streetwise Opera tend to come up with amazing people, people who all seem to want to work with us, it makes you feel good. The standard of the people is really amazing.

We also put together an **advent calendar** featuring work from A Gallery For All and recorded a Christmas tune to thank our supporters.
**In This Place** was a project involving 34 participants and students from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance which was co-produced with the award-winning company Shobana Jeyasingh Dance to explore how singing and movement come together on stage to create more powerful and expressive opera.

I struggled with the movement aspect of the project, at first, but the staff showed me ways of doing it and it's been great. I've even lost a few kilos!

Our final project for the year, **The Deer Rising**, brought together 47 participants to perform Chapter 5 of The Deer, with participants from each region working once again with their local vocal leaders. This piece was recorded remotely and will be used as the soundtrack for an animated film produced by students from Teesside University.
3.3 Pastoral support

Recognising the impact of the pandemic on our participants’ lives, we increased the amount of pastoral support provided outside of our regular sessions. Our support workers made a total of 1,096 calls for a total of 315 hours to 137 participants over the year. We also distributed creative worksheets by mail to 67 of our regular participants and 225 individuals in hostels. In addition, during a brief period in the summer when social restrictions allowed face-to-face meetings, we organised five meet-ups bringing together a total of 45 participants. Finally, in February 2021 we started to deliver We’re All Ears, a weekly online pastoral care session that provides Streetwise participants with a safe space to share their feelings and thoughts.
Case study: a support worker’s perspective

Jane has been working as a support worker for Streetwise Opera for two years. Jane’s role, initially, was to attend Streetwise Opera sessions and provide support to those who needed it during or after the sessions. Jane’s role changed when lockdown happened, with more pastoral support provided. Jane phoned and texted participants on a weekly basis, and with the more recent easing of restrictions, she has been going for walks with participants. Jane also provides support during the online sessions: “We would normally do face-to-face sessions, and also take participants to see shows, operas. Because of lockdown, there’s been an awful lot of loneliness, so, with the weather improving and the easing of restrictions, it’s been great to go for walks with participants and chat. It’s gone down really well with performers. People tell me how grateful they are.”

Jane found that one of the principal challenges of providing support remotely is that not everyone has access to the necessary technology. She explained how, “as a support worker, I found doing telephone support quite challenging. You can’t see the person you’re talking with. You can’t see their appearance. Often, someone’s appearance will indicate whether or not they’re going through tough times. I think about half of the people I support haven’t got access to technology. Streetwise Opera, for a while, were giving people tablets and smartphones, that was great.”

Overall, Jane feels that the way Streetwise Opera reacts to the participants’ needs is really good: “Streetwise Opera always strives for excellence. The way they bring in top class talent for the sessions… participants really appreciate this.”
3.4 Feedback on our activities

As well as understanding what difference our activities have made to participants, we believe it is important to understand how people have experienced our activities. This was particularly important this year as we had to design new activities to engage participants and deliver these in radically different ways.

Did participants enjoy taking part?

The vast majority of participants who completed our feedback survey told us that they had enjoyed taking part in our activities over the last year.

Have you enjoyed taking part in Streetwise Opera’s activities over the last year?

A lot: 16  A bit: 1  A mixed experience: 5  Not much: 1  Not at all: 1

Their comments included:

“It kept me sane while I was in isolation and seeing other people even on the computer was super and being able to sing was even better.”

“Super effort by all at Streetwise Opera. You have been brilliant.”

“You kept people involved and active.”

“I think the Streetwise Opera staff have been incredible, thinking of different ways we can do creative things across the arts, via technology. That’s been amazing, the inventiveness and the ideas.”

1 The figures reported in this section do not always add up to total number of respondents who completed the feedback survey because not all of them answered all the questions.
Streetwise Opera's activities were fun

Agree: **20** Not sure: **1** Disagree: **1**

“I really enjoyed working with everyone.”

“It’s been great doing the tasks we have been doing. It makes you feel good in your heart, mind and soul. Plus it puts a smile on my face.”

“I just get a good feeling being there.”

The enjoyment and sense of fun that participants had gained from taking part in our activities was also highlighted in the feedback from some of our homeless centre partners:

“All of the sessions have been really well received by the clients and staff. The activities have been creative, fun, enjoyable and all-inclusive, and [the Streetwise Opera staff] have been a pleasure to collaborate with in all the sessions.”

“The work Streetwise Opera do is amazing! They have a wonderful and friendly team. Our ladies enjoyed our art sessions and also loved the end artwork which we now have in frames ready to be displayed. They look amazing!”

How well did we adapt our activities?

We also wanted to know what participants thought of the way that we had adapted our activities in response to social restrictions.

Overall, what do you think of the way we have adapted our activities in response to the pandemic restrictions?

You’ve done very well: **10** You’ve done OK: **9**

One person noted how quickly we had responded:

“You’ve adapted very well, managing to go online straight away.”

Another noted how we had preserved the sense of safety they had felt when engaging in our in-person activities:

“They managed to maintain that place of safety, and it has to begin with that before you can create anything.”
Others commented on how we had evolved our activities as time went by:

“Streetwise Opera are always trying new things and mistakes are only made, if any, when new things are tried. I’m glad it’s been challenging at times. I have low motivation, so I’m excited when Streetwise Opera do something new and creative, just to forget the lows of the pandemic at times.”

“You have learnt, grown and developed. You have used Zoom well.”

One support worker explained how they felt participants had valued the efforts we had made to preserve our ethos of creativity and inclusion:

“I feel that what the participants appreciated the most were the innovative lengths Streetwise Opera has gone to in order to keep the creativity alive in people’s lives during this difficult time…. As a support worker, I’m really impressed that restrictions on group singing haven’t affected Streetwise Opera’s aim for creative excellence and for making sure everyone feels included. It’s pretty special.”

The artists who responded to our feedback survey also noted how well participants had engaged with the projects:

“Everyone seemed to enjoy the sessions and I felt that I was able to involve everyone.”

“I felt this was really positive. They were very engaged returning for multiple sessions and they were open and excited about what they were achieving with the project. A lot of this positivity from them is because Streetwise Opera fosters such a great, fun and caring atmosphere for the sessions.”

“I was amazed at how much the performers came along for the ride – they tried everything we threw at them. It was amazing.”

Artists had also appreciated the support they had received from our staff in delivering the sessions and keeping participants engaged:

“Amazing support workers.”

“I think all facilitators in the sessions held the space really well, supporting all performers and addressing their needs whilst leading the session.”

“Communication was swift and reciprocal. It never felt, both in terms of content or technology, that I was left alone and that was comforting.”
How easy was it for participants to join in our activities?

The vast majority of participants who completed our feedback survey told us that they had found it easy to access our activities.

Streetwise Opera’s activities were easy to access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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Some participants described how they had been able to engage in different ways with our activities:

“I have a computer, so it was OK for me to access the workshop.”

“Originally it was difficult to set up Zoom so I could join in with group chats, but once it was all put together, I was happy to be able to join with others from Streetwise Opera.”

Some had feared that they would not be able to take part in online sessions:

“For me, it’s the tech. I was terrified, at first, but we got help, workshops, just about doing recordings.”

“Since last March, I was so scared of using Zoom, I didn’t want to do it. It’s only recently that I decided to try it, because I couldn’t find anything else. For me, the Zoom sessions have been revolutionary, it’s really helped me.”

The IT support that we provided to the participants seemed to have helped some overcome these challenges:

“I got so much technical support from Streetwise Opera. I just couldn’t have done it otherwise.”

Others had valued the efforts we had made to include them in other ways:

“I didn’t have internet for a year, but I appreciated being sent creative projects in the post to participate in.”

However, not all participants had enjoyed taking part in the online activities. One person explained simply:

“I do not enjoy the online experience.”

A lack of access to technology had also prevented some from engaging:

“I have completely withdrawn from the Streetwise Opera experience.”

On the other hand, one person had found the online sessions easier to participate in than our usual in-person sessions:

“As an autistic person, I found this so much easier and less stressful than the live sessions.”
How helpful was the extra support from our support workers?

During the year, our support workers provided extra support to participants, keeping in touch with them by text, phone calls, Zoom, and some face-to-face, socially distanced contact. Postcards and letters were also sent to people who could not be reached otherwise.

Participants told us that they had valued the extra support provided by our support workers.

How helpful was the support you received from our support workers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>OK</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

Some described how the personal contact had kept them going through difficult times:

“Someone mentored me during a stressful time.”

“My support worker is an amazing person and fully understanding of my plight.”

“It was great to receive support from [my support worker], who I feel helped a great deal with worries and concerns.”

“[My support worker] met up with me to have a catch-up and a socially-distanced coffee.”

Support workers had also helped participants to take part in our activities:

“I have had lots of support from [the support workers], like phone calls and help with recordings.”

“Each week / fortnight, [one of the support workers] calls me to see how I’m doing with meetings online, and those phone calls are very encouraging and friendly.”

Support workers described how their contact with participants had increased during the pandemic, which, they felt, had been welcomed:

“I think many of our participants have really appreciated the extra contact with a Streetwise Opera support worker.”

“People tell me it feels good that they’re being thought about and encouraged to stay creative.”

Support workers had also found that the disadvantages of not being able to see performers face-to-face were counterbalanced by some positive aspects:

“I believe bringing the support into participants’ homes (through the telephone and Zoom) has had a positive impact, as they have felt individually supported throughout the year.”
“I have found it really positive on the whole. It has strengthened my relationship with participants.”

These advantages have led support workers, and some participants, to state that, although face-to-face contact had been sorely missed during the pandemic, the online contact should be maintained once the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. One participant explained:

“I think the creative element has been enhanced. There's clearly been a lot of thought going into how it can actually be made to happen and seems to have enhanced what we're doing. It's bringing it together a lot more. I think maybe the Zoom meetings should be kept after Covid, even if it's only occasionally.”

Similarly, one of the support workers said:

“Many performers have commented that they have really enjoyed the opportunity to meet with other regions and feel part of a wider group. Many have asked for this continue.”
4.

Our impact

This year, in evaluating the impact of our work, we focused on how we helped participants to increase:

- Resilience
- Social inclusion
- Emotional wellbeing
- Creative skills and identity
- Digital inclusion
4.1 Resilience

Given the challenges of coping with social restrictions, increased financial hardship, and difficulties accessing services and support, all of which made day-to-day living so much harder for our participants, we were keen to know if the support we provided helped build their resilience, both in the immediate and longer-term.

**Keeping participants’ spirits up**

The vast majority of participants who responded to our feedback survey felt that our activities had helped them to keep their spirits up.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me keep my spirits up

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
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For some, having something to look forward to was important:

“I really enjoyed taking part in Streetwise Opera’s online sessions, in the unprecedented times we were all in lockdown, the sessions gave me a great lift in my mood and also gave me something to focus on doing the weekly projects.”

As one support worker put it:

“Our participants tell me that having online sessions and workshops to attend gives them something to look forward to every day and brings a consistent bit of joy to being stuck at home.”

Another noted how taking part in our activities had helped participants develop resilience through being creative:

“I have witnessed so much resilience from participants. I believe Streetwise Opera to be very unique in the way it fosters this resilience. We are not a support service. We are an arts charity who will support you every step of the way to be creative and flourish. It is a special way of working.”
Helping participants cope with lockdown and social restrictions

Many of our participants live alone and were therefore hit particularly hard by lockdown and other social restrictions. Many felt we helped them cope with being isolated.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me cope with lockdown / social restrictions

Agree: 18  Not sure: 1  Disagree: 1

Some participants described how important the virtual contact that we facilitated with other people had been to them:

“To see all the faces, when you're not able to see anyone in the flesh, that's really helped me during lock down.”

“Lost in lockdown, helpless and looking for a safe place to keep us away from the virus. I feel that Streetwise Opera helped all of us.”

“During corona, I felt isolated, so it has been wonderful to have been heard and seen.”

“It's been a lifeline for those of us still in shut-ins.”

Our support workers were also acutely aware of the isolation our participants were facing, and saw the positive impact of our activities:

“We have been the sole point of contact for many who have had to self-isolate or were clinically vulnerable.”

Similarly, one of our partner agencies described how taking part in our activities had helped their clients cope with lockdown:

“[it helped them with] coping with the lockdown and the restrictions, as some of our ladies at first did not leave their rooms.”
Equipping participants to deal with life challenges and face whatever the future may bring

Many participants stated that taking part in our activities had a positive impact on the way they were able to deal with challenges in their lives.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me deal with challenges in my life

Agree: 16  Not sure: 5  Disagree: 2

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me feel I can face whatever the future may bring

Agree: 14  Not sure: 3  Disagree: 5

One participant, for example, told us that they had been able to start working through personal issues:

“It's helped me face up to other experiences that I've been through.”

Another found that it provided a helpful sense of structure in their life:

“Taking part in sessions was something to look forward to everyday and brought a sense of order to the chaos.”
4.2 Social inclusion

People who have experienced homelessness are particularly likely to experience deep social exclusion (FitzPatrick et al., 2011), and recent research has shown that the risk of social exclusion was further exacerbated by the pandemic (Boobis & Albanese, 2020; Groundswell, 2020).

Facilitating contact with other people

The social contact we provided was, therefore, particularly important, as many participants had told us that being isolated was one of the hardest parts of being in lockdown.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me keep in contact with other people

Agree: 18 Not sure: 1 Disagree: 2

Having online sessions meant that participants from all regions could take part, which created new contacts and friendships among participants:

“T’ve been able to meet lots of new people and share ideas with them.”

“We’ve met lots of new people. We’ve made friends all over the country.”

“T’ve all connected with each other, and it’s enabled us to link up with Streetwise members in different parts of the country.”

“Connecting to all the different regions was great. We can mingle with all the different groups, now.”

Our support workers also witnessed how important this social contact had been for participants:

“One of the performers had not been able to get to in-person sessions (pre COVID-19) due to physical health but has been very engaged in the online activities/projects and thus more socially included.”

“Participants have told me that, without the Streetwise Opera sessions, they would not feel connected to others at all and would feel isolated and excluded.”

This was echoed by one of our partner agencies:

“Having the art group helped restore a sense of connection between everybody in the project after living and working under so many restrictions.”
Creating a sense of community

The social connections we facilitated also appear to have helped participants gain a sense of being part of a community.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has given me a sense of being a part of a community

Agree: 18  Not sure: 0  Disagree: 2

Many participants particularly valued the fact that they had supported each other:

"It also helps having people in the group who are good at some things, because everyone in the group is supportive of each other."

"I loved the way we all supported each other."

Indeed, many described Streetwise Opera as like "a big family." This was also noted by one of our support workers:

"There has been a lot mentioned about feeling part of a wider family."

As another support worker put it:

"Participants have gone out of their way to support each other both inside and outside the sessions and there is a real sense of connection and belonging, even though we are apart, to what they call the Streetwise Opera Family."

Another noted how participants had developed connections with those who ordinarily attended Streetwise Opera activities in other areas:

"All the regions joining together in sessions has been joyful and has helped people feel connected."

"Many participants have enjoyed connecting to a broader community including other regions."

This was something that participants also valued:

"It was brilliant being able to bond a lot more with performers from all around the UK and make friends."

"I have enjoyed interaction between all of the Streetwise groups from different parts of the UK."

The sense of coming together to work on communal projects also appears to have supported this developing sense of community:

"It was quite remarkable the way we were all together in it."
“Collaborating, in that way, it was a wonderful coming together of people, to make this lovely piece.”

“I particularly liked the fact that everybody interlinked with each other, it was just lovely to be able to do that.”

“I absolutely loved the collaboration.”

Improving social interaction

As well as improving social connections between participants, our work also appears to have helped some participants improve their social interactions outside of Streetwise Opera.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me get better at interacting with other people.

Agree: 15  Not sure: 4  Disagree: 1

One of our partner agencies noted how some participants had improved their social skills:

“Some of our clients built up some confidence within themselves and are now more sociable and engage better.”

One of our support workers felt that this had enabled participants to be more involved with their local community:

“Streetwise Opera’s support has allowed participants to be active members of their community.”

Some participants also discovered that even interacting virtually with others had deepened their social interactions:

“It’s weird, you’re on your own in your room, in front of a screen, and yet you can feel empathy with other people.”

“For me, it was the idea of interacting with people putting across their message, their ideas. Whether it’s a flower or a bird, finding out the reason they put that across, the stories behind it.”
4.3 Emotional wellbeing

Research has shown how the experience of homelessness can destroy self-esteem and self-confidence (Smith et al., 2008).

Increasing participants’ self-confidence

Increased self-confidence in participants appears to be one of the most common impacts of our activities. It was widely reported by participants who responded to our feedback survey.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me feel more confident in myself

Agree: 20 Not sure: 1 Disagree: 0

Increased self-confidence was also reported by those who took part in our group interviews, many of whom had described how a lack of confidence was a barrier to surmounting other challenges they faced. Finding that they had grown in self-confidence was, therefore, particularly important:

“I don’t think people know what they can do, until they get the chance, how far we can reach if we’re given the chance. You do get a lot of confidence because you’re doing things you didn’t know you were capable of.”

“It’s taken me a long time to accept that I have mental health problems. Taking part in Streetwise Opera’s activities has really boosted my confidence.”

“I have become a voice where I was just an echo.”

Some also described how they had noticed other participants gaining self-confidence:

“I've seen some of my friends’ work [displayed online], and they say it's boosted their self-confidence, their self-esteem, to know that their work is online.”

“I've noticed a lot of confidence in other people, people in the group doing things and saying things who, in the past, were less involved.”

Our support workers also frequently mentioned this:

“Without question I have seen confidence and self-worth in sessions rocket.”

“Those who have joined in with the online programme have been most positively impacted in terms of growing in self-confidence and feeling empowered.”

“Definitely performers have grown in confidence.”
Developing participants’ sense of self-worth

Our activities, and the support we provided to participants during the year also appear to have had a positive impact on participants’ sense of self-worth.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has given me a sense of self-worth

Agree: 19 Not sure: 1 Disagree: 0

Some participants described how being part of the online activities we organised had helped them feel valued:

“Taking part in the activities was something that felt transformative, something that felt like I was doing something, being part of something bigger than myself.”

“What I thought was very good was that you got to meet celebrities, through Culture Club. It gives you a buzz and makes you feel special. It made such a difference.”

Another participant described how they had developed a greater belief in themselves and their ability to move forwards with their life:

“It made me look into who I am as person, trust my own instincts more and end procrastination to progress in whatever I want to achieve.”

Our support workers confirmed this, with one commenting:

“The support that the performers have received from Streetwise Opera has impacted their emotional well-being, especially having a positive impact on their self-worth and self-confidence during isolation.”
Helping participants cope when feeling down

Giving participants ways of coping when feeling down has been another positive impact of our activities.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has given me ways of coping when I am feeling down

Agree: 18  Not sure: 1  Disagree: 0

Participants described how our activities had both provided distraction and offered new ways of looking at the world:

“\text{I feel I achieved patience to take in my surroundings and appreciate life more. Doing the work on The Linden Tree gave me a deeper appreciation of nature and people, and also life itself, as you just seem to take things for granted a lot without realising it.}”

“I suffer from anxiety, and if I didn’t have interesting things to do, I would have been a lot worse with my mental health. We are living in strange times, and this is a taste of normality. It’s the essence of what we were doing before lockdown.”

“It took you away from all your worries, family stuff that was going on at the time. It was a complete diversion; it took you into another world.”

“I liked the fact that you could use your imagination, that was great, because you could take yourself away from what’s going on now and be part of something else. I loved that.”

“To feel that you’re part of something special, it really helped me.”

The way in which our regular creative, shared activities has helped participants develop their coping strategies was also highlighted by our support workers:

“I’ve learned through the weekly phone calls that some participants have benefitted from having some sort of routine, especially one focused around creativity and community.”

The contact we had with participants also provided an opportunity for participants to express their worries and stress:

“The pastoral people have been fantastic. I’ve really appreciated having a chat, like all people I’ve got different things going on in my life, being able to chat with a support worker has really helped me. Streetwise Opera have helped to support us mentally.”

4. Our impact  |  4.3 Emotional wellbeing
“One of the ethos of Streetwise Opera is it’s a safe place where you can go and just be yourself, and express yourself, and everyone’s accepted, and they managed to translate that online, I don’t quite know how.”

“You know that you’re not alone, you don’t have to suffer in solitude.”

Improving participants’ mental health

Overall, our activities appear to have had a positive impact on many participants’ mental health and wellbeing.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has made me feel healthier

Agree: 18  Not sure: 2  Disagree: 0

In particular, many participants described how our support has helped them cope with depression and anxiety:

“They supported me when I felt so low and made me feel part of something.”

“Thank you, Streetwise Opera. You have helped me overcome loneliness and depression during the lockdown.”

“I don’t know how I would have coped without the project. I think my mental health would have been worn out.”

Taking part in our activities has given participants something to do which helped them cope with negative feelings:

“I have times when I get really low, but doing The Deer was so stimulating. And listening to the performance, I recognized some of the words that I’d written when I was depressed, and I was amazed. I got a real kick out of that.”

“Singing, performing, meeting people helps me with my anxiety / depression.”

It has also helped some participants to keep mentally active:

“It gave us access to a different form of perspective, to hear of the new ideas coming through. To be part of that is just wonderful. It’s also a stimulant for our brains, so we’re not losing our brains because of Covid, we’re exercising our brain.”
Two of our partner agencies also described how they felt their clients’ well-being had improved as a result of taking part in our activities:

“The workshops have had a significant impact on our client’s well-being and mental health as it gave them one of the few opportunities to gather in a safe social environment.”
4.4 Creative development

Alongside the benefits of our work in developing participants’ mental and social wellbeing, we also aim to develop their sense of creativity.

Stimulating participants’ interest in the arts

The creative aspect of our sessions appears to be particularly important participants.

“Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has increased my interest in the arts generally”

Agree: 18 Not sure: 3 Disagree: 0

Introducing participants to new artists and new ways of expression was key to stimulating their interest in the arts. For example, some told us how they had been inspired by the artists they worked with:

“I’d heard of Abigail Kelly, and I knew we were going to work with her. She’s a phenomenal soprano, and she didn’t disappoint, and it was a heck of an opportunity to be able to sing with someone like that. I didn’t know what to expect, and it was really amazing, it was like going on an adventure.”

“It was an honour to work with top class people. It showed me what imagination and creativity can do. Seeing into the world of different genres, across the whole of the arts spectrum, it was fantastic, a great opportunity.”

“I think having guests, it’s a beautiful idea. The fact that we’re being introduced to new perspectives, each individual brings in their own vision. And we’re interactively taking part, we’re creating new ideas that we can put forward individually and as a group.”

Others described how they had discovered new aspects of the creative process:

“The creative writing part of The Deer was amazing.”

“It was really good to get a full picture of what it takes to make a production. You don’t realize how much is involved. It felt like entering somebody else’s work.”

“I loved the music, the improvisation, it was mind-blowing.”
This was echoed by our support workers:

“Since March, Streetwise Opera has constantly encouraged participants to get creative not just in sessions but at home and it has been truly astounding to see what participants have been up to. The fact they can submit their work to an online gallery or share it with others, fill out creative packs and send them in has had a huge impact... I have seen so many participants blossom creatively over this last year.”

“Having the space and opportunity to try other mediums of art, creativity such as photography and poetry has definitely had a positive impact on participants.”

Developing participants’ creative skills

Participants also described how their creative skills had been enhanced by taking part in our activities.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me develop my creative skills

Agree: 18  Not sure: 2  Disagree: 0

Some participants described how they had improved existing skills:

“I feel like I improved my vocal range to be part of the performance of The Linden Tree, which I thoroughly enjoyed taking part in.”

“I’ve learned how to develop an idea from the seed to the full flavour of the fruit. Whether it’s poetry or something else. The workshops provoke these thoughts and make them stronger”

Others had learnt new skills:

“When we worked with the sitar, we had to count sixteen bars, which was a challenge, but I got used to it. I find it easy now.”
“I used to be terrible at drawing, but I found that taking time, trying, I improved a lot.”

“The photography, that was a real, practical new skill for me, they taught us really well, how to look through the lens and everything.”

For other participants, taking part in our online sessions led them to discover new ways to be creative:

“I think it’s enabled us to try different skills.”

“I enjoyed the poems. And you learn different skills, Gareth knows his stuff.”

“I particularly enjoyed the people’s pictures, all the drawings. I’d never thought about doing anything like that, it was so interesting. Also they gave us tips on how to do it, that was so useful, for me.”

“I loved the classes about different aspects. We got instruction on how to take photographs.”

“I think it helps with the way you think about things. Seeing the artists develop their projects and being part of it, you realise what’s involved and the skills that are behind everything.”

Finding their creative identity

Developing their interest in the creative arts and picking up new creative skills appears to have helped participants discover their creative identity.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me see myself as a creative person

Agree: 16 Not sure: 4 Disagree: 0

Participants told us how they had begun to realise they had creative potential:

“I’d never written a story with other people before, I didn’t think I’d be able to do it, but it was quite a revelation, to me.”

“I think there’s always room for improvement, but it’s really inspired me, it’s made me do things I didn’t know I was capable of.”

“The one-to-one sessions on how to breathe and use your voice were very helpful. I didn’t know I had a proper voice, but now I sing with a few choirs.”
“I liked the fact that we did so much of it ourselves, writing our own songs and composing our own music.”

The artists who led many of the session also highlighted the way in which participants had developed creatively:

“The content of the sessions was very rich. I think some of the activities achieved in the sessions surprised the participants and pushed their comfort zones, but they delivered satisfying results.”

“I think the final outcome of the film and music surpassed what we set out to do and has huge future potential.”

This was also witnessed by our partner agencies:

“A few of the ladies had an interest in art, and some were very creative even though they didn’t think they were before starting the project.”

One of our support workers pointed out the added benefit of participants gaining a sense of creativity:

“Often there is an elitism surrounding galleries and art, and I believe the online creative sessions have created a positive inclusion and accessibility.”
4.5 Digital inclusion

People who have experienced homelessness are often excluded from the digital world; many rely on mobile phones to access the internet which may be unreliable or use up their credit (Dyce, 2019). Others lack knowledge and skills to access the increasingly sophisticated digital world. Yet, digital inclusion has become more important than ever with welfare benefits and other vital services now only accessible online (Citizens Advice, 2021).

Developing new skills and confidence

The majority of participants stated that taking part in our online activities had helped them learn new IT skills.

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me learn new IT skills

Agree: 12  Not sure: 6  Disagree: 2

Many participants described how difficult they had found adapting to accessing our activities online and how they had had to develop new skills to overcome this:

"I just find online stuff hard and trying to engage through a computer stressful but managed it."

"It’s definitely improved my IT skills, which I’d never had before. Even logging on to Zoom was a challenge for me at times."

Our support workers also noted the increased IT skills of participants:

“The majority of the performers definitely learnt new IT skills and gained the ability to interact virtually with the team.”

“There are a least three performers I can think of who are now much more tech savvy and confident to access Zoom.”

The IT support we provided played a crucial role in increasing participants’ IT skills:

“I was terrified, at first, but we got help, workshops, just about doing recordings.”

“I got so much technical support from Streetwise Opera. I just couldn’t have done it otherwise.”

Our support workers were also impressed with technical support we provided to the participants:

“Streetwise Opera has fully supported performers to use IT wherever they have wanted to, providing devices and data but also tutorials and time to guide people through. There is never a ‘no’, there is always, ‘we will do our best to teach you’.”
"I think many who felt they had no IT skills surprised themselves. With support they were good to go, up and running."

Many participants also lacked confidence in using IT before our online activities took place. Our technical support and the sheer determination of participants to ‘give it a go’ have had a positive impact on participants’ confidence using IT.

As one support worker remarked:

“There have been some incredible results – the numbers of attendees and creative work submitted speaks for itself. Many performers hadn’t been on Zoom or used a smart phone a year ago.”

Some participants told us how their newly found IT skills would be useful outside of our online activities:

“I loved the fact that we learned about studio recording and filming. It was interesting, learning all these new skills, which I’m sure I’ll be able to use in the real world.”

“I picked up how to actually record, using different platforms. I’ll be using those skills, because I’m actually in a studio, doing an album for charities. And I’ll be making films and editing them.”

Taking part in Streetwise Opera activities this year has helped me feel more confident using IT

Agree: 15 Not sure: 2 Disagree: 3

One participant explained how they now felt confident making recordings and using Zoom:

“I gained confidence in the use of audio recording apps and using Zoom for online workshops and also gained a deep respect for the workshop leaders and staff, that put their time and effort into helping us get through this awful time.”
4.6 Other impacts of our work

Although we did not set out to capture the impact of our work on the organisations and people we worked with during the year, we found, nonetheless, that they reported to us the impact this had had on them.

Homeless centres’ staff reported the positive impact that our work appeared to have had on their interaction with their clients who had taken part in our sessions. As one explained:

“Over the different sessions, I have seen many clients grow in self-confidence both in the artwork and communication. Staff noticed a positive change in their interaction within the hostel and when engaging in their support plan.”

In addition, some of the artists who collaborated with us on our projects told us that they had gained a deeper understanding of the experiences of people who are homeless:

“It’s a much more complicated and widespread problem than I had ever realised.”

“It’s made me aware of how prevalent this group is in society.”

“I now have a total understanding that it is an issue that could affect anyone.”

While some already had experience of working with adults at risk, other artists had had little or no such experience and discovered how rewarding this work could be:

“I think the performers had so much more confidence and expressivity than I was expecting. I know now that I can challenge them and don’t have to worry that they can’t handle it, as they were incredible (better than most adults) at trying something outside of their comfort zone.”

“I have absolute respect and admiration for anybody who has been affected in this way and am humbled by their openness and willingness to take part.”

This had encouraged one artist to increase their engagement in such work:

“Before I worked with Streetwise Opera, homeless people were something I walked past in the street and didn’t give a second thought to. Streetwise Opera has given me the opportunity to meet and work with these people I used to take no notice of and passed by. Not anymore. I have met some wonderful human beings who have inspired me to change! I now speak to that someone sitting on the street and also invite them to come to our sessions. I look forward to working with them every week. In fact, I feel blessed.”
Shortly after Jim finished his studies in Stoke-on-Trent, his life took a turn for the worst. Jim is reluctant to talk about the details of what happened, but explains that “everyone turned against me. My friends, my family. I was ostracised, it was awful.”

Jim decided to move to Manchester, despite not knowing anybody there. “Things were getting worse and worse for me.” After a period of time being street homeless, Jim found a place in a hostel. Members of Streetwise Opera’s staff then visited Jim’s hostel, and “…that was it. Everything changed. I started going to Streetwise Opera’s sessions regularly, and I don’t know how they did it, but I could feel my confidence growing, coming back at last. I suppose it’s the way they obviously value you, as a person.”

Jim did have recurring bouts of depression, but “I still managed to keep going. Streetwise Opera gave me a focus point, something to hold on to, and I managed to find accommodation, partly through their help.”

Although Jim did find lockdown difficult, he is clear that Streetwise Opera, through a mixture of online activities and support, saw him through it. “Would I have coped with lockdown without Streetwise Opera? Probably, but it would have been so much harder. My GP did call me regularly to ask how I was, but without Streetwise, that would have been it. My Streetwise Opera support worker also called me regularly, and I got a lot out of that, a feeling that someone genuinely cared about me.”

Jim feels that he has picked up some skills through his involvement with Streetwise Opera. “I have learned to sing which, in itself, isn’t a lot of use in my everyday life, but it has boosted my confidence so much. After years of being told I couldn’t do this, I’ll never be able to achieve that… My father once heard me sing and told me I wasn’t allowed to sing in the house, because I was hopeless at it. Well, I’ve discovered that I am not.”

Jim also feels that, through Streetwise Opera, he has learned to deal with people in a far more productive way. “Now, that is a lot of use in my life. I don’t let people get to me, I don’t let people with bad intentions cause me sadness or anxiety. Seeing how Streetwise Opera deal with all kinds of different people, including some challenging people, made me understand that there is always a way of moving forward. I can’t thank them enough for that.”
Looking ahead
Evaluating the impact of our work during 2020 – 2021 has provided an insight into the ways in which our activities and support have enabled participants to not only cope with the immense challenges that this year has brought, but to develop their confidence and skills and flourish as creative individuals.

The pandemic forced us to reimagine ourselves and completely rethink both the activities we offer and the value that we can bring both to individuals and wider society. This evaluation suggests that we have responded as best we could, offering both individual connections and creative stimulation and provocation that could sustain participants through lockdown and beyond.

Nonetheless, many challenges lie ahead. As we continue to innovate and evolve our work, we are committed to forging new partnerships with a wider range of homeless and arts organisations and focussing our projects where the need is most urgent and the opportunities greatest. We want to reach a wider demographic of people who have experienced homelessness and ensure that all our participants not only have the chance to work with leading artists and organisations but are able to speak for and about themselves.

We want to challenge and change the perception of homelessness, promoting new works of art that have diverse community voices embedded at their heart, and demonstrating the positive impact that the arts and work of professional artists in all genres can have on the wellbeing of all people in society, particularly those marginalised and isolated.

We will continue to offer creative activities in safe and supportive environments – where people can leave their troubles at the door, and do not need to talk about their personal circumstances. Places where they are asked ‘what’s strong with you’, not ‘what’s wrong with you’. Where people can find themselves again, by being creative.

5. Looking ahead
References


