September 2026

ARTS LAB IMPACT REPORT 2026

Commissioned by Cornwall Council Resettlement Service



Cornwall Council Resettlement Service | Arts Well | Headstart Kernow | Creative Kernow | Resettling refugees in Cornwall



BACKGROUND

Launched in 2022 by Creative Kernow, Arts Well and HeadStart Kernow, Arts Lab uses creativity to support young people's health, happiness and wellbeing. By connecting professional artists with young people in schools and youth settings, the programme creates opportunities for participants to work collaboratively, develop new skills and express themselves through creative practice.

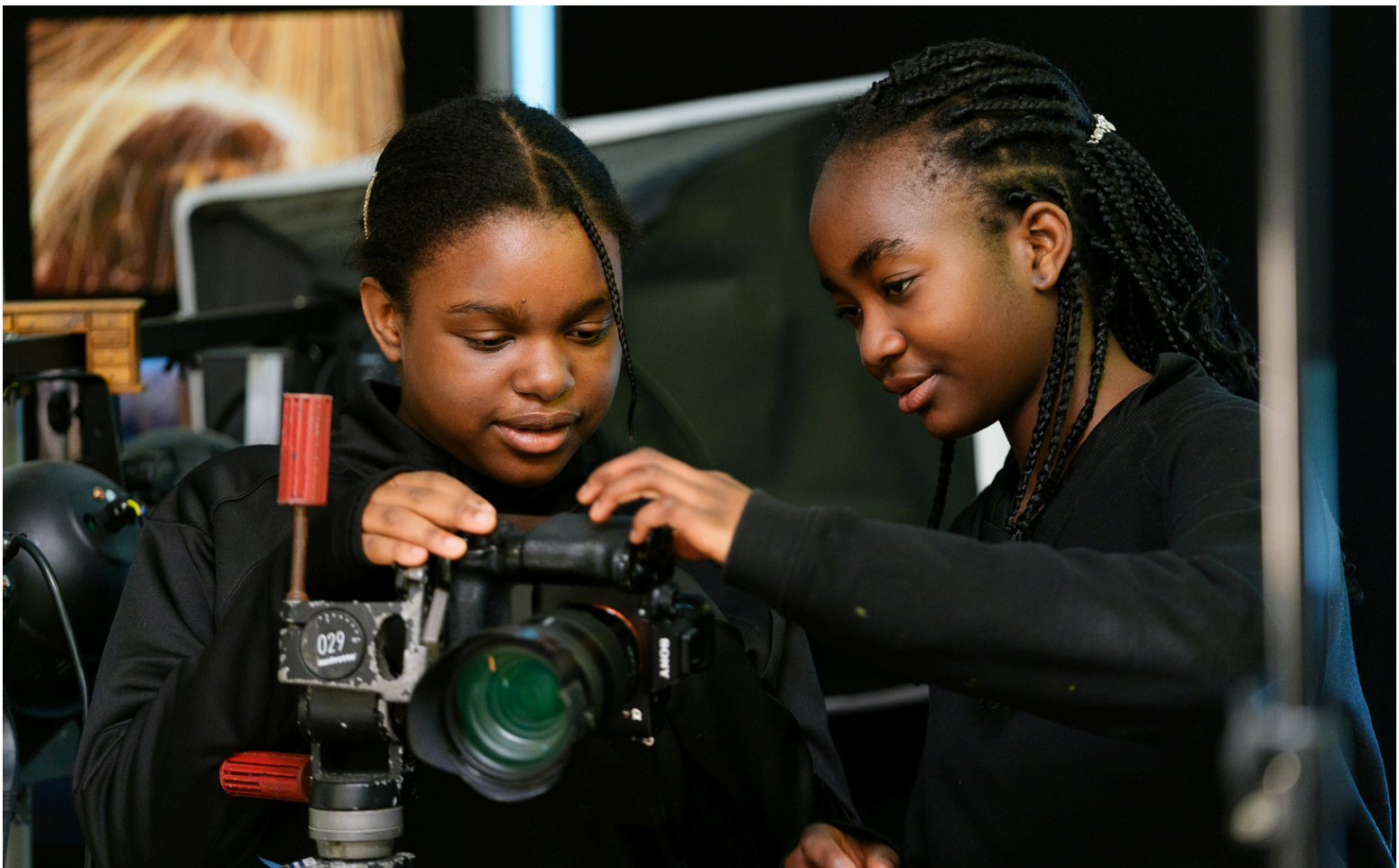
In its fifth year, Arts Lab developed a partnership with Cornwall Council's Resettlement Service to explore how creative activity could support young refugees and their peers to build meaningful connections. Through a programme of artist-led projects, young people from different backgrounds were brought together to create, collaborate and share experiences. The projects were designed to build empathy, celebrate difference and strengthen belonging, community cohesion and inclusion. Alongside the creative outcomes, the programme sought to create spaces where young people could develop confidence, form friendships, learn from one another and feel a stronger sense of connection to their communities.

This report captures the impact and learning from this work. It explores how creative practice can provide a powerful and accessible way to bring young people together, challenge assumptions, encourage connection and contribute to more inclusive communities.

The findings are intended to support funders, commissioners, practitioners and partners in understanding the value of investing in creative approaches to integration and belonging, and to inform the development of future programmes.

TIMELINE

November 2025	Schools and community groups allocated
December	Artists recruited
January 2026	Artists training with the Resettlement Service, which included: • the context for young refugees in Cornwall • non-verbal communication approaches • q&a with case workers
February-June	Project delivery: 4 - 8 workshops taking place in each setting. Some end with a sharing event Photographer recruited to capture workshops
June	Refugee Week showcase
July	Evaluation and Reporting









170 YOUNG PEOPLE

Engaged from Ukrainian, Polish, Hungarian, Syrian, Afghani, South American, Iranian, Cornish and English backgrounds.

11 SETTINGS

This includes 5 secondaries, 5 community groups and 1 youth organisation where 56 workshops were delivered with 15 artists.

100%

Of staff who have fed back - teachers & youth workers - believe that Arts Lab projects have built empathy, understanding and fostered belonging.

100%

Of staff who have fed back believe that Arts Lab projects had a positive impact on young people's wellbeing.



SKILLS DEVELOPED

CREATIVE SKILLS

Dance
Felting
Fashion Design
Textiles
Photography
Drawing
Illustration
Painting
Collage
Performance
Screen Printing
Animation
Storytelling
Upcycling
Using a sewing machine
Sound art
Digital art
Parkour
Clay
Ceramics

EVERDAY SKILLS

Communication
Confidence
Leadership
Ownership
Teamwork
Creative problem-solving
Decision-making
Planning and organisation
Patience and perseverance
Empathy and understanding
Social skills
Self-expression
Adaptability



FEEDBACK

“The sessions were run by some very patient, trauma informed and caring people. Previous to the project starting they were very curious in ways they could be supportive to the young people, and this really showed within their practise.
The sessions themselves created space for insightful and beneficial conversations with the young people about their hopes and dreams for the future and brought to the surface some of the concerns that some of our young people feel about their future and space to talk. These conversations inspired their creativity and they all expressed their individuality in their work.”

Case Worker

“During the second workshop, our female refugee student began to come out of her shell, collaborating more and speaking confidently about her work. Another student, who occasionally struggles with behaviour in other subjects, emerged as a true leader and an inspiration by encouraging the group to participate. Additionally, a third student demonstrated such talent in textiles that he has since asked his mother for a needle and thread to continue practicing at home.”

Secondary School Teacher

“I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank you following the Art Lab sessions. The students gained so much from the experience – not just in terms of their creativity, but also in their confidence and willingness to collaborate.
It was particularly wonderful to hear how engaged they were throughout, and we are especially proud of how much X grew in confidence over the course of the project. Experiences like this make such a meaningful difference for our young people.”

Secondary School Teacher

Young people's feedback demonstrates the social, emotional and developmental impact of Arts Lab. Creative activity created opportunities for young people to build relationships across different friendship groups, develop greater understanding of one another and feel a stronger sense of belonging within their community.

Participants also reported increased confidence to try new things, with creative sessions providing a low-pressure environment where they could explore new interests and skills. The emphasis on enjoyment, collaboration and self-expression helped young people to relax, de-stress and participate without fear of judgement, supporting positive wellbeing and creating conditions in which young people could feel safe, valued and included.

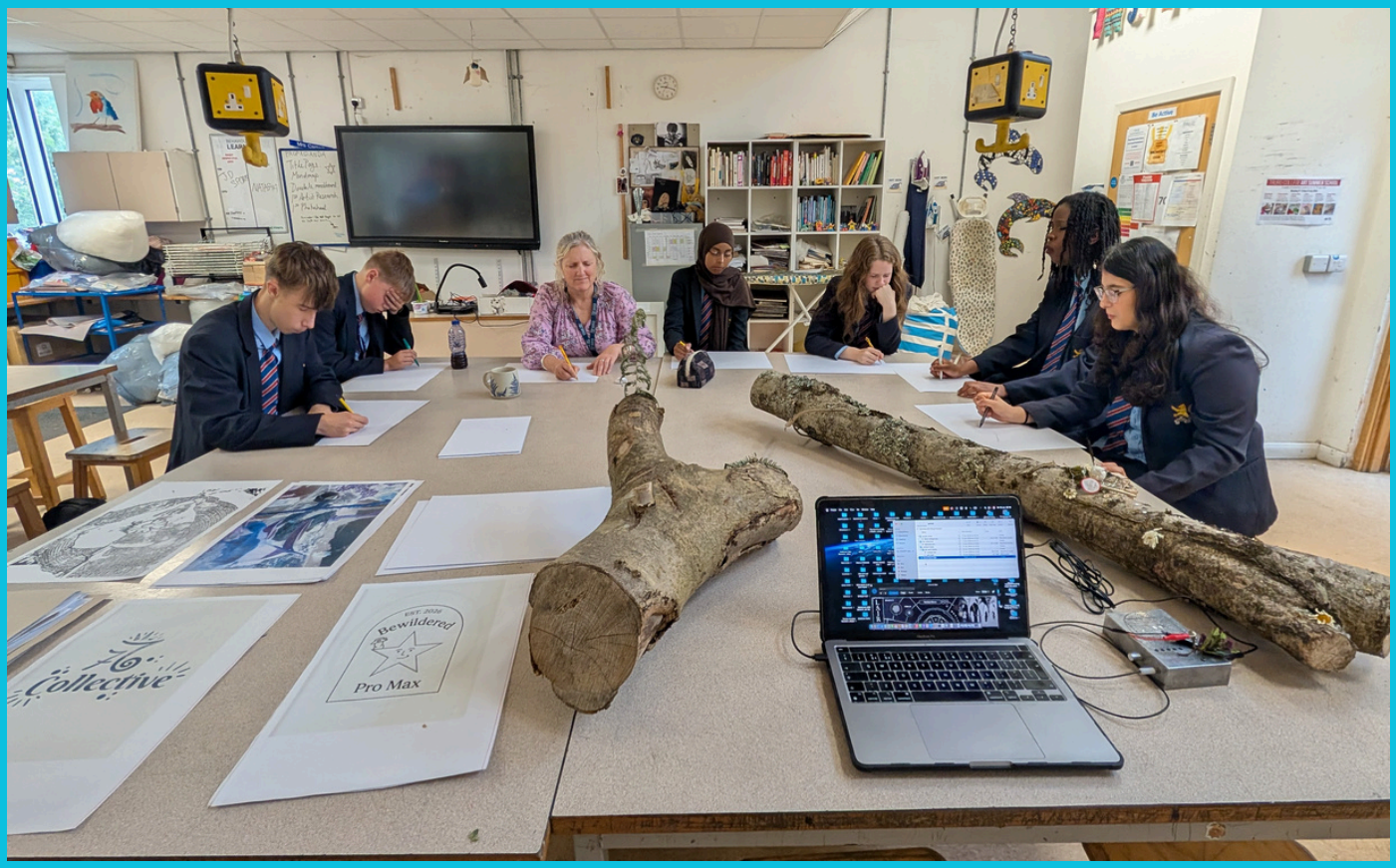
"Lovely idea for introducing ideas for bringing people together – much needed in our community."

"The session was amazing, I love parkour now!"

"I loved working with different students I don't normally hang out with, I liked going in the photography studio with them!"

"It was safe, warm and relaxed space to socialise and be creative in, with no expectations or pressure."

"I 100000000% want to be involved in this again!"



LEARNING



Reflections were gathered from artists, teachers and youth workers to identify the programme's successes, challenges and learning, helping to inform the development of future Arts Lab projects.

Key successes to celebrate:

- **Positive impact for young people:** All projects reported positive outcomes, supporting social cohesion, mental health and wellbeing, and a stronger sense of belonging among participating young people.
- **Successful partnership working:** Weekly partnership meetings with Arts Well and HeadStart Kernow bring a wealth of experience, knowledge and expertise to the programme, supporting collaboration, shared learning and the ongoing development of Arts Lab..
- **Celebrating achievement and connection:** The Refugee Week Showcase provided a valuable opportunity to celebrate the young people's creative achievements and bring participants, artists, teachers and case workers together. It created space to share experiences, recognise progress and identify ideas for future collaboration.
- **Strong support for artists:** Artists valued the training sessions, ongoing support from Creative Kernow and opportunities to reflect and share learning with other artists. This helped artists feel better equipped to work with young people from diverse backgrounds and strengthened the quality and confidence of delivery.
- **Building sustainable relationships:** The programme strengthened relationships between schools, community organisations, artists and the Resettlement Service, creating a stronger foundation for future creative activity and ongoing community connections.



To learn from:

- **Strengthen communication with schools:** Communication and coordination with schools could be improved to support smoother planning and delivery. The new schools lead role within the Resettlement Service should provide a clearer point of contact and help strengthen these relationships for future projects.
- **Plan around cultural and religious events:** Future projects would benefit from greater consideration of cultural and religious calendars when scheduling activities. For example, religious festivals such as Eid can affect young people's availability and energy levels, particularly for out-of-school activity, so planning projects around key dates will help maximise participation and engagement.
- **Complete workshops earlier in the project year:** Where possible, schedule and deliver workshops earlier in the project year to maximise the time available for curating, developing and preparing refugee week. This would allow more time to bring the creative work together and create a stronger showcase of the young people's achievements.

CONCLUSION

Arts Lab has demonstrated the clear value of creative investment in supporting young people from resettled and refugee backgrounds and their peers. The programme has shown that creativity is more than an activity: it is a powerful tool for building relationships, community cohesion and creating a sense of belonging. Drawing, movement, music, photography and making have provided safe and authentic ways for young people to explore their own identities and experiences, while developing empathy and understanding of others.

This work is particularly important in the current social and political climate, where misconceptions and division can affect how different communities perceive one another. Investing in positive relationships at a young age can help create stronger, more connected communities. Schools and community settings have an important role to play in providing safe spaces where young people can meet, question assumptions and develop respectful relationships.

Now in its fifth year, Arts Lab has developed a strong foundation of experience, trusted partnerships and learning. Each year has enabled the programme to refine its approach and build on what works, strengthening relationships with Cornwall Council's Resettlement Service, schools, communities, youth organisations and creative practitioners. This accumulated experience has enabled the programme to respond effectively to the needs of young people while continuing to develop and adapt its delivery.

Arts Lab has established a strong foundation for creating meaningful connections between young people from different backgrounds. Future development will focus on strengthening school and community partnerships, starting projects earlier to allow more time for creative development and celebration, considering cultural calendars when planning activity, and continuing to create opportunities for young people to connect, collaborate and build understanding across difference.

Five years of delivery have demonstrated what can be achieved when creativity, wellbeing and strong partnerships come together to strengthen relationships, challenge misconceptions, build understanding and help young people feel that they belong.

We look forward to building on everything learnt and achieved during this year as we go into year six of delivery.



PARTNERS

HEADSTART KERNOW

CREATIVE KERNOW

Arts Well

FUNDERS

CORNWALL COUNCIL | Resettlement Service

