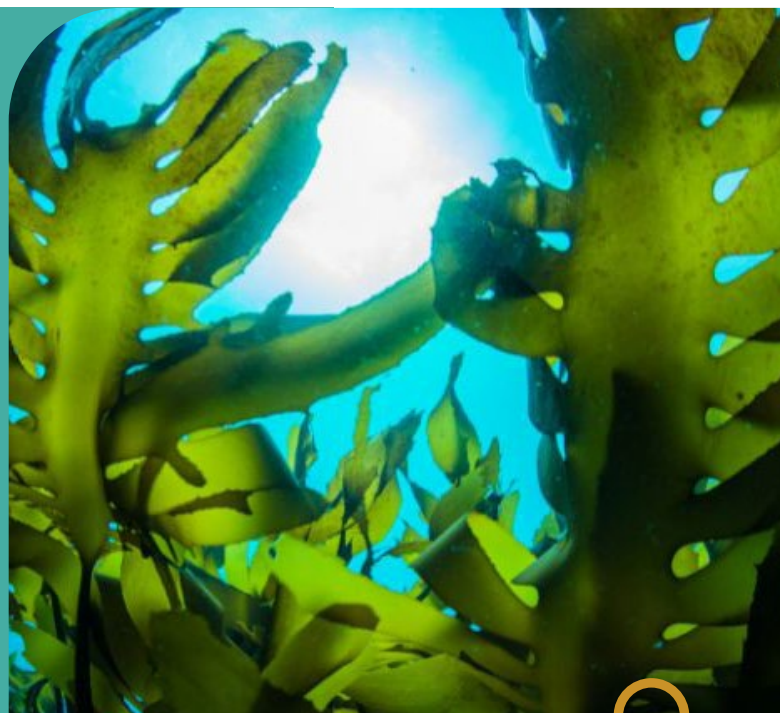


Creative Waves Seaweed Art Project

Inspiring neurodivergent students to get creative and build confidence and self-worth

Inspired by the work of the Sussex Seabed Restoration Project (SSRP), this initiative provided free creative workshops delivered by Creative Waves Community Arts for 40 learners aged 11 to 16 in two West Sussex schools – Bohunt High School and Worthing High School.



The project aims included:

- boosting the well-being, confidence and educational aspirations of mainly neurodivergent students who struggle with conventional learning methods
- endorsing the children's positive attributes and strengths through inspiring activities
- helping them to conquer their challenges by developing a positive outlook
- broadening their horizons regarding their educational and career opportunities
- enabling students and parents/carers (especially home-learning families) to connect and support each other through out-of-school activities so they feel less isolated.

METHODOLOGY

To recruit candidates for the project, Creative Waves targeted children it had worked with before as well as those signposted by parents and teachers as fitting the criteria of being 'quirky, creative thinkers'. No diagnosis was needed – and the project included children who were dyslexic and neurodivergent, had anxiety and low confidence, and those struggling at school but interested in problem-solving, creative, practical tasks, science or art.

A talk by SSRP's founder Steve Allnut on restoring kelp habitats along the coast kickstarted the project and was followed by a Q&A and the chance to view seaweed spores under a microscope. After the talk, students were able to attend a number of pop-up studios and school workshops run by Creative Waves' Nadia Chalk and Nussy Breen. Experienced in working with neurodivergent children, they created a welcoming learning space where students felt relaxed and able to challenge themselves artistically.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Context

It's estimated that 15 to 20% or one in seven people in the UK are neurodivergent – and have a different way of thinking that's outside the 'educational box' of many schools, according to government statistics. This 'not fitting in' can cause issues such as a lack of confidence, low self-worth and aspirations, and exclusion from opportunities that are available to their neurotypical peers.

Duration

17th January 2023 to 6th March 2023

Partners

Sussex Seabed Restoration Project, Creative Waves Community Arts, Bohunt High School and Worthing High School

Funding source

SLN Community Fund

Inspired by Steve's talk and underwater images, the children designed and decorated wooden pieces using recycled materials. Some of the pieces – a bench, old breakwaters and 'rounds' of wood, – were installed in April in the BugCycle Community Garden in Worthing's Beach House Park, where they will be displayed for two to three years. During the sessions, the children also learned more about seaweed, the environment, how images can tell a story and different art techniques and materials. From Steve (who is dyslexic), Nadia and Nussy's example, they learned that despite not fitting into the accepted 'educational boxes', by working hard at something they love they could enjoy fulfilling, creative lives and careers.

In total, 88 young people took part in the pop-up studios and three family sessions – including 10 home-educated students (most of whom presented neurodivergent traits), 38 Year 8 to 10 students from Bohunt High School and Worthing High School and 20 parents/carers. Since the official sessions, the project has been shared with 14 other young people who attend Creative Waves' after-school art and design clubs.

Given the neurodivergent nature of those taking part, observations of the students' interactions, photographs and anecdotal evidence rather than written evaluation forms were used to evaluate the success of the creative sessions.

IMPACT

The impact of the project was wide-ranging. It has enabled:

- parents /carers to motivate their children, who enjoyed the creative sessions, to try other extra-curricular activities
- Creative Waves to connect and build trust with new young people – many of whom wouldn't normally have had the chance or inclination to access the workshops – and also with parents/carers, particularly the growing number of home-learning families who can be hard to reach
- students to realise that their ideas, concepts and content are valuable even if they don't have great drawing skills
- parents/carers to meet other families like them, as well as better connect with their own children through the creative activities
- young people and adults to learn more about SSRP's work and how important it is to the local environment.

Feedback from children, parents/carers and teachers endorsed the positive value of the project for everyone involved:

"The students enjoyed the tasks immensely, which was evident in their behaviour and artwork. It's a shame that they can't attend lessons like this every day." Teacher

"All participants at the pop-up workshops were interested in supporting Steve's help project and appreciated the value of his work." Parent/carer



It's a shame that they can't attend lessons like this every day!



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This pilot project demonstrated how Creative Waves' community engagement skills have helped SSRP, and it has also provided a good foundation for bigger future funding applications and initiatives. All the families attending the creative sessions wanted to support the kelp project and it is hoped that, in a few years' time, thousands of local people will have connected with SSRP through these workshops.

Recruiting school-attending neurodivergent to join the pop-up workshops was one of the project's hardest challenges. Although the project was well promoted through Creative Waves' networks, there were difficulties around trying not to offend parents/carers and children who don't realise or want to admit they present neurodivergent tendencies, which are often still viewed negatively in mainstream society.

Some young people can feel uncomfortable with new places and people, and some didn't attend the workshops even though they were interested. This was frustrating as the project wanted to work with small groups, which meant that it couldn't overbook the sessions. Recommendations by word-of-mouth from those who know the project will hopefully help reassure others about getting involved.

Families are keen to be involved with their children's education but without the pressures and restrictions put on them by the curriculum. Many teachers had the same views and were very grateful for the cross-fertilisation of subjects – science, geography, art and design, environment, health and well-being – within the project.

The number of home-educated children has increased massively since Covid, and this project presented a good opportunity to connect with them. There is a real need for engaging activities that inspire adults and children to get involved with the project and to make the effort to add creative sessions to their home-learning timetable.

Families told us that they liked the pop-up studio as it didn't feel conventional, which appealed to their children. Evidencing this to the local council will hopefully help Creative Waves to secure the space for future projects.

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